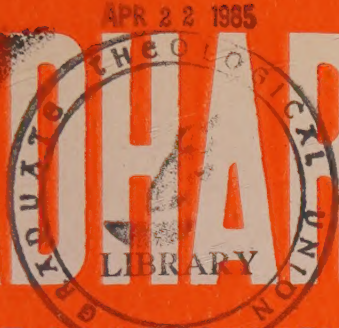


# JEEVA DHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION



## FAITH AND REASON

FAITH AND REASON: PLACE AND ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE  
RATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FAITH

*John B. Chethimattam*

RAMANUJA'S DEVOTIONAL APPROACH TO SPIRITUALITY

*J. Manickath*

INDIAN CULTURE AS A THEOLOGICAL BASE

*Thomas Manickam*

SHARIAT, THE ISLAMIC APPROACH TO FAITH

*James Narithukil*

THE EGYPTIAN OSIRIS-ISIS MYTH AND THE  
DRAVIDIAN CILAPPADIKARAM

*Zacharias P. Thundy*

POST SIXTH CENTURY CHALDEAN TRADITION

*J. B. Chethimattam*

BOOK REVIEWS

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# **The Meeting of Religions**

**FAITH AND REASON**

Editor

**JOHN B. CHETHIMATTAM**

Associate Editor

**THOMAS KOCHUMUTTOM**

Theology Centre  
Kottayam - 686 017  
Kerala, India

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## Editorial

All religions deal with faith in a transcendental reality. The most crucial question in this respect is how human faith is able to attain the transcendent. How can the transcendent be revealed in the phenomenal World of human experience? This is the problem of the relation between faith and reason. There is no doubt that man attempts through faith to reach the Beyond. But does he actually attain it? Religions have tried to answer this question in different ways, and the theme for discussion in this issue of *Jeevadhara* is the complementarity of those divergent approaches to faith.

The most serious intellectual objection against the attainability of the transcendent through faith is that the phenomenal world, including man and his rational perceptions, is not anything outside of or additional to God. If God is really God he is the only reality and there can be nothing outside of and additional to him, who is one-without-a-second. If there were anything outside of or additional to him, he will not be infinite and he will not be God at all. So if human faith pretends to apprehend God as an object, what it takes hold of cannot be God. But the movement of reason is in the direction of an object. Knowing anything it tends to the infinite, being satisfied with nothing finite and evaluating everything particular in the light of absolute truth. So human intelligence by its very nature is the capacity for infinite truth. The task of theology is to resolve this paradox of the incomprehensibility of God and the infinite tendency of the intellect.

The Hindu approach takes for granted the unreality of the world of experience and considers faith as the passage from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and from death to immortality. The world of experi-

ence is the shadow and reflection that point towards the Real as the source and ground of its origin, sustenance and final dissolution. Through faith the illusion ceases to be and reality shines forth, and what was looked upon as the fearsome serpent turns out to be the rope of safety. All religious discourse should be taken as symbol and myth pointing away from itself to the really Real that can be grasped only through intuitive experience. The legend of *Cilappadikaram* is such an intercultural myth that reveals the tensions, conflicts and fond success involved in the religious quest. Zacharias Thunday makes a scientific comparative study of the myth.

Faith itself transcends culture, but it can be perceived only through the flesh and blood of a particular culture. Thomas Manickam examines the needs and requirements for a cultural understanding of Christian faith in the Indian context. My own article examines the role of culture in the rational elaboration of faith in a more universal context.

Another approach to faith as a self-disclosure of God is presented by Islam. It looks on religion, the Quar'anic revelation, the Sunna and all other aspects of the Islamic way of life as *Shar'ia*, law, manifestation of God's will within the sphere of human life. James Narithukil in his article examines the different dimensions of *shar'ia*.

The most important method for overcoming the dichotomy of the One and the many in the field is to view God as a person, the Lord, before whom man stands as a person, a child deriving all that he is and all that he has from the Lord. Here the language of faith is *Bhakti*, total surrender to the Lord in perfect devotion. This approach is presented by J. Manickath. These are only a few partial perspectives of a very complex theological issue.

John B. Chethimattam



# **Faith and Reason: Place and Role of Culture in the Rational Development of Faith**

Perhaps the most startling fact about religion is that though it is essentially faith in God, it is very much man's faith and fundamentally a human phenomenon. Faith is defined a theological virtue by which under the inspiration and help of God we accept by our mind the self-disclosure of God in his great deeds and utterances not because we understand their intrinsic truth but because we accept God the Revealer as our supreme Good and realize that accepting what God has revealed is essentially related to our final end and happiness. It is essentially a rational act since we know it is good for us to accept the divine self-manifestation. It involves both our rational will and intellect. But something that is not often consciously recognized is the cultural conditioning of our reason. Man is not a pure spirit and his rational faculties do not operate in a vacuum. Even man's religious thinking, his reason inspired by faith is very much culturally conditioned. I shall examine in this paper how the very concept of faith itself, the understanding of divine Reality and the perspective on human salvation are all conditioned by the cultural background and thinking pattern of the particular people concerned. Human culture is the matrix in which man's religious life takes shape. This will, I hope, bring out the importance of intercultural understanding for achieving harmony among religions and the active co-operation of all religious people for the good of humankind. I shall also show how at the same time faith transcends and transforms culture.

## **1. Cultural diversity and different concepts of Faith**

Culture is essentially the system of values and perspectives transmitted from generation to generation con-

cerning the different coordinates of the human existence like the satisfaction of physical needs, acquisition of economic means, understanding of social relationships and the establishment of political structures for the smooth and harmonious working of the different sections of society. But among all these value-loaded coordinates of human existence the question of ultimate meaning extending even beyond the eventual tragedy of death predominates in the ordering of the hierarchy of values. Hence the belief in an ultimate Being or a transcendent order of Reality is basic to culture and the rational development of human life. In this sense it may be said that faith is an integral part of culture and even its foundation. Still, how that faith is perceived depends very much on the manner in which people come to view their physical environment, economic possibilities, social relationships and the whole world itself.

For the people who came to inhabit the Greek mainland in three successive waves between 3000 and 1000 B. C. life was a struggle with the impossible situation presented by the rugged nature of the terrain, the infertility of the land and the constant need to defend one's parcel of property against encroachers. Turning to industry they conceived the whole earth as a sort of machine with a moving logos or spirit in it, just as man himself was a small machine moved by the soul<sup>1</sup>. The different Greek concepts arose from this situation: Chaos arose from the vision of an empty space; Moira or destiny originally indicated the portion assigned to each one; Nomos or law was the fence protecting one's property, dike or justice was one's "due share"<sup>2</sup>. Even the idea of being arose from this situation, since according to Plato real being "is something so constituted as to possess any sort of power

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1. Ellsworth Huntington. *Mainsprings of Civilization*, New York Mentor Books, 1959, pp. 590-91

2. See F. M. Conford. *From Religion to Philosophy*, New York: Harer Torch Books, 1965, p. 82; W. W. Jaeger. *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Galaxy Books, 1965, pp.60-62.



either to affect anything else or to be affected"<sup>3</sup>. In this condition of struggle the ultimate and ideal reality for the Greeks was the form of all forms, the supreme Good. The Good is the sun of the intellectual world that makes every act of knowledge possible and gives meaning to all the aspirations of man. According to Plato this Good is participated on the spiritual level through the weaving of ideas in the particular concepts like justice and loyalty, and on the level of ordinary experience by the limitation of idea by matter. In this line of thinking faith is discovering each particular being as an intermediary end in one's move towards the final Good or as an intensive participation of the Ultimate. Hence faith for the Medieval Scholastics who faithfully followed the Greek cultural pattern and its philosophical strand of reasoning was accepting the particular items of divine Revelation as intensive participations of the Divine Truth itself. Something is accepted in faith because it is recognized that rejecting it would be equivalent to rejecting the divine Good itself.

But already in the Medieval thought the emphasis shifted from the ideal world to man's self-direction to his final goal. As Thomas Aquinas states, God's will is that each being should attain its final perfection and goal through its own activity. So he defines faith by God the final end of man: *Deum credimus, Deo credimus, in Deum credimus*. God is the total object of our faith; He gives us the power to believe, and the effective attainment of God is the final point of our movement through faith.

But Christianity was also rooted in the Judaic culture in which it was originally born. Hebrew religious culture was very much conditioned by the wanderings of a semi-nomadic people who found Yahweh its powerful ally in its struggle against the elements and the dangers of desert life. The name of God for the Hebrews "Yahweh" lite-

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3. *The Sophist*, 247 d-e

rally means "I am who will be", that is, "I shall be faithful to my word". For Israel faith was trust and fidelity, faithfulness to the covenant with Yahweh. The God of the Old Testament is a moral God who demands that his people should follow his own faithfulness in the keeping of his promise, in the protection of the widow, the orphan, the alien and the down-trodden. In the sixteenth century Martin Luther and the Protestant revolution emphatically reaffirmed this Biblical idea of faith: Faith is not merely an acceptance of certain truths but man's total response to God in complete trust. It is the total act of the will by which one surrenders oneself to one's ultimate Goal. The human will is the unique principle of self-determination and faith is the act by which man can surrender his whole being to God. The same personalist idea of faith is found also in Islam with a further refinement: Faith is not blind surrender to God. Islamic concept of *Shari'a* includes fidelity, obedience and love thus making faith the all embracing virtue that makes a true "Muslim".

In Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, faith was conceived in a totally different cultural context. The Buddhist experience of faith came at a time of radical social change owing to urbanization. At a time when people moved from the countryside to towns built on the trade routes like Vaisali, Varanasi and Rajagriha great many people lost their religious background firmly built on customs, traditions and communitarian structures. Individuals were thrown on their own to discover their ultimate meaning of life. Urbanization naturally produced as its side-effect a great deal of human exploitation, misery and suffering. In such a situation in which the traditional religion with its Gods was the symbol and focus of the structures of exploitation, the understanding of faith itself shifted the emphasis to the need for human liberation from such an oppressive situation. It is, however, interesting to note that Buddha's message of liberation was addressed first and foremost not to the poor but to the rich and the powerful, because the oppressor with all his wealth, power and influence is as much a prisoner of the



material things as the poor and the oppressed who suffer from the lack of material things. Hence the solution for both is the same: Each one should take up the responsibility for his own life and view the phenomenal world as an order of things outside oneself. In this perspective the world of experience is a twelve-linked chain consisting of ignorance, motivation, consciousness, name and form, the six sense organs, sense contact, sense experience of pleasure and pain, desire, clinging, becoming, birth, old age and death. The role of faith in this view of life is to enable one to go beyond the phenomenal world of bondage. Sraddha or faith is explained as the magical ring that by its touch transforms the muddy water into crystal clarity. It is compared to the self-confidence and courage with which a lonely traveller on a mountain-top in a dark night saves himself: The brook he has to cross in order to reach safety is swollen by rain, and he cannot see clearly his way owing to darkness. But he has the assuring words of the competent guide who tells him that he can take a leap and reach the other side. Confidently relying on the words of the guide he has to take his life in hand and make the leap. This is the role of faith. Each one is a stream of consciousness that traces its own orientation in life<sup>4</sup>. The sad state of suffering and bondage one finds oneself in is the result of orienting oneself on the basis of ignorance and motivations arising therefrom. Sraddha or faith enables one to stand apart from this phenomenal world of bondage, take a detached look at it and then maintain one's independent status as a pure stream of consciousness.

The Hindu rational approach to faith represents a different cultural matrix. Its search for the Ultimate Reality is not in the direction of the Form of all forms, nor for an ultimate goal and aim, but for the ground and source in which all being is unified. The starting point of this inquiry is the supposition that Reality is One alone with-

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4. See Thomas A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience*, Delhi- Varanasi,- Patna: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982.



out a second. Unity of all reality has to be taken for granted since multiplicity implies division, limitation and inauthenticity. Hence multiplicity of things is what needs explanation. The ultimate ground of all reality is infinite immutable consciousness, the One-without-a-second. Faith or *Sraddha* is the sacrificial fire which transforms the world of experience and unites it with the ground of all reality<sup>5</sup>. If the inner reality of man is thought of as a person, *śraddha* (faith) is its head, *ṛta* (cosmic harmony) its right side, *satya* (truth) the left side, *yoga* (insight) is its body and *mahas* (might) is its lower portion or foundation<sup>6</sup>. Faith is the necessary concomitant of the harmony of all things and of truth. In this perspective the divine Reality is more minute than the minute, greater than the great, set in the heart of every being<sup>7</sup>. God is not only transcendent standing above all that is particular but also immanent being more intimate to the reality of things than their own particular natures; for the one is absent from the interior of things cannot be the all embracing transcendent.

The task of reason in this perspective on faith is to show how every aspect of man's life and the world of his experience is permeated by the Divine Presence. This implies a two-fold function of faith imposed by the particular cultural orientation: One task is to recognize that our world of multiplicity is hierarchically organized with its focus in the divine center. Ours is not a world of desperate individuals in conflict and competition, but rather interpersonally related members in the cosmic organism. Each one receives what one is and what one has from the same basic source not for one's own satisfaction in isolation from others but for the service of others. Each one is called upon to communicate what one has received in generosity to the service of others. The best example of

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5. *Chandogya Up.* I, i 10; V, iv, 1; *Mundaka Up.* I, 2, 11

6. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, 2, 4

7. *Kathopanishad*. II, 20

this orientation is an artist. An artist, for example a dancer, performs his art not for any selfish interest but for the enjoyment of the spectators. The other aspect of sraddha is to discover the infinite whole and entire in every particle and atom. A man of faith is not like a scientist who goes to the seashore and wants to analyse the mass of water into the molecules and atoms that constitute it, but like a visionary who seeing a drop of dew on a blade of grass contemplates the whole wide ocean in it.

## 2. Role of Culture in the development of theology

In the development of religion from its earlier experiential, mythical and ritualistic stage to a more developed, organized and sophisticated maturity human reason was very much conditioned by its particular cultural background. In the West religion itself was caught up in the general processes that led to the emergence of modern industrial society. They were marked by an irregular sequence of phases in which institutions economic, political and religious became increasingly specialized in their functions and tended towards functional rationality. Just as the different fields became increasingly autonomous and detached from the "sacred cosmos" there came the need to bring that sacred cosmos itself within the purview of reason. Faith is a rational service and so has to be intelligible.

The history of Christian theology is an object lesson in this ongoing struggle between faith and reason. When people well versed in Greek rational thought like Clement of Alexandria and Origen embraced Christian faith they were rather reluctant to put the two together. They developed their philosophical thinking and faith expressions on parallel lines without reconciling them. Two types of human knowledge one coming from above through divine Revelation and the other from below by the light of human reason were perfectly understandable to them, and they did not feel any necessity or possibility for reconciling them.

But Greek philosophy kept raising problems for Christian thinkers. If God is God how is it possible to have Three in the same Godhead? How could the divine Logos really unite himself to a perfect humanity in Jesus Christ? The defenders of faith had by necessity to exclude those philosophical propositions which were incompatible with faith. They had also to devise some way of talking about the mysteries of faith making them intelligible to ordinary people. People like Athanasius and Pope Leo and Church councils like those of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon made clumsy combinations of terms drawn from Greek and Latin to make faith statements to exclude obvious errors and to outline basic facts of divine Revelation. Thus against Arianism the Council of Nicea defined that the Logos is homoousios or consubstantial with the Father. For if Christ, the Son and Saviour, were not truly God he could not bring us the true fellowship with God, which is the essence of salvation. The Holy Spirit is truly God, because otherwise he could not divinize us. Pope Leo argues against both Nestorianism and Monophysitism that our Saviour has to be really One, at the same time consubstantial with God in divinity and consubstantial with us in true humanity. For centuries people were expressing unhappiness with the inadequacy of the terminology used in the interpretation of faith. At the same time theologians went ahead refining their metaphysics as well as terminology to arrive at an agreement between faith and reason.

Soon thinkers like Gregory of Nyssa and Basil in the East and Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas in the West realized that for faith to be fully human and fully convincing it has to be rationally justifiable. But there were different ways for this rational justification. The Greeks had too vivid a memory of the disastrous consequences of investigating faith purely within the bounds of a given philosophy to rely to any great extent on the powers of reason to understand faith. They preferred to start with the apophatic method and say that regarding divine realities we know more what they are not rather than what



they actually are. For them the only way to understand the supernatural was from above in terms of the dynamics of the divine self-disclosure to man in the Incarnation and Pentecost, the experience of the Risen Lord in the Eucharistic celebration and the experience of the Spirit in Grace. Besides, Christianity which was born in the bosom of Judaism had to make a smooth transition from the Hebrew culture to the culture of the Greeks. For the former salvation was the great work of Yahweh establishing his kingdom among his own people. For the Greeks with their passion for clarity and intelligibility the crucial question was how the Supreme Good which is diffusive of itself could be effectively shared by human beings. First of all Christianity had to establish that God is not impersonal Good but tripersonal, Father, Word and Gift. In the heart of the Godhead there are three distinct persons who metaphysically speaking are in reality three subsistent relations, Father pure paternity, Son pure sonship and Holy Spirit pure spiration. Since salvation is an adoption into divine sonship it has to be an assimilation to the person of the Son who in the Incarnation assumes into his divine personality a perfect human nature thereby becoming the head of humanity, since he is truly God and truly man at the same time. Hence the Greek Christian thinkers like Basil, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Naziansen explain salvation as an ongoing series of intimate human encounters with God: Starting from the encounter with God the Father, Creator and lawgiver of the Old Testament, our salvation is effectively realized in our meeting with his Son, the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ, who achieved human redemption through his death and resurrection. It is still continued in our ongoing experience of the Holy Spirit who was sent to us by Christ on the day of Pentecost.

Western thinkers like Augustine and Anselm had greater faith in the independent power of reason to understand faith. When Augustine stated the ideal of rational thinking in theology as "I believe that I may understand", Anselm defined theology as "faith seeking under-

standing". Augustine's application of reason to faith is to show in Neo-Platonic fashion how the Word which was eternally with God and truly God became truly man, suffered, died and rose from the dead and raised with him the whole human race to a share in the contemplation of and union with the divine Reality. But his starting point is divine Revelation, what is found in Sacred Scripture about the mystery of human salvation. The first effort is to find certain analogies that would clarify the statements of Scripture. Then at a second stage he seeks to find a certain reflection of the divine mysteries by an introspective examination of the human psyche, since if at all there can be any reflection of the divine in nature it can be only in the human spirit. But the decisive stage of his theology is anagogical, which means theology is not a matter of mere theoretical knowledge, but an active movement towards real union with God. The heart of Anselmian theology is this anagogical aspect of theologizing. Often speaking to monks who lived a life of contemplation he tried to show that the divine mystery which they actually experienced is the model and pattern for understanding the whole human life in the light of faith: God is therefore that Greatest in relation to which everything else has to be known. Though this was perfectly intelligible in a contemplative world of faith, in terms of pure rational investigation even regarding the existence of God this was considered an unwarranted leap from the mental world of ideas to the real world of things.

The basic problem here is how human speech about God can cut itself loose from the limitations of its creaturely condition without ceasing to be human and humanly meaningful. Anselm's reply to this is that language of every kind and at every level has an authentic relation to the reality and intelligibility of God<sup>8</sup>. He assumed as

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8 S. Ephrime's *Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan*. ed. C.W.Mitchell, vol I, London, 1912, p.vi. See C.R.Evans. *Anselm and Talking about God*. Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1978, pp: 17-18

his starting point that God's rationality is the same in kind, though not in degree as the rationality of man and hence it is possible to rise from man's rationality to an understanding of the nature of God.

The theology of the Medieval scholastics was very much conditioned by the culture of the times. It was an age of humanism with a heightened awareness of man, his achievements and a possibility of unlimited progress. The rediscovery of Greek art and literature, contact with other lands through navigation, and the emphasis on a man's self-respect and the reliability of his word which were the source of strength for the whole feudal system, all made man the focus of attention. In this context Aristotelian philosophy which conceived the integrity and full development of human nature as the goal of life had a strange fascination for the people of Europe. A clash between this closed view of man, all sufficient for himself, and the Augustinian tradition which viewed human knowledge, love, perfection and full happiness as a reflexion of the divine Supreme Good was inevitable. Here St. Thomas Aquinas found the key for reconciling the two opposing views in the philosophy of Pseudo Dionysius, who stated that the first installment of the self-diffusion of the Divine Good was the individual natures of things including man and their faculties moving them towards the achievement of their perfection through their own activities. So man is sanctified by the communication to man of the divine nature through the continuing grace of the Holy Spirit dwelling in his heart.

Every Western system of theology is an attempt to create a framework of concepts and propositions according to the line of thinking of a particular philosophical system in order to understand and explain divine Revelation. If the ordinary man's religion is conceiving the divine mysteries in terms of the common symbols, myths and magical beliefs of everyday experience the theologian tries to do the same in a more scientific and systematic way creating new myths and generating new quasi-



magical expectations. Often this is restricting the divine self-disclosure within the straight jacket of human conceptions. It is saying that faith is neither mere legend nor blind belief nor any other irrational process. But all religious experience including the data of divine Revelation, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the authority, teaching and worship of the Church should be rationally explained like any other field of human activity, economics, politics, sociology and the rest. Just as each of these areas has its own particular field of investigation and particular methodology, theology as the science of faith has its own well defined sphere of research and its own definite methodology.

But Eastern Christianity other than that of the Byzantines, represented by thinkers like Ephrem and Aphraates and the theological schools of Edessa and Nisibis, provide another method of theological approach. Instead of explaining the mysteries in terms of a transcendental order of things as the Byzantines did or interpreting them in terms of a rational system of thought as both Western thinkers and the post-sixth century Chaldean thinkers like Babai and Isoyab attempted to do, these endeavoured to permit the particular mysteries of faith as presented in the Bible disclose their own inner dynamics. The what, why and whither are not introduced from the outside, but brought out from within the sacred events themselves. They have their own inner logic and provide directions and orientations of their own. Thus St. Ephrem explaining the Gospel event of St. Peter walking on the sea at the command of Christ shows how it reveals the complexity of faith: though the Lord of the waves was holding his hands Peter had his own initiative and responsibility. Much greater is the complexity of faith: For in the waves of the sea only bodies are drowned, but in the waves of the rational investigation of faith minds sink or are rescued. Similarly the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican has an inner logic of its own which cannot be brought within the framework of any particular philosophy. The Pharisee did nothing wrong; but he was not justified. The Publican is

actually in an impossible situation out of which he could hardly get out. "He was in a state of fear and love; he both verily loved the Merciful One on account of His forgiveness, and he verily feared the Judge on account of His vengeance. And though, on the one hand, he was praying in love because of his affection, yet, on the other hand, because of his fear he would not dare to lift up his eyes unto Heaven. And though Grace was urging him forward, his fear was unable to cross boldly the limit of justice."<sup>9</sup> Hence instead of imposing on the divine mysteries of faith our preconceived rational order of thinking we must allow the inner logic of the divine events to shape our outlook on life and create the framework for our rational thinking.

The function assigned to rationality in Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism is, again, radically different from the Graeco-Western perspective. In the sedate and tranquil cultural history of India these religions were not looking for a point of unity and harmony, for the really Real, but for the ground and source of one's own identity. For the East philosophical and religious inquiry did not start in wonder as for the Greeks but from an awareness of the psychological suffering and inner conflict within man himself. Hence though the Vedic Aryans who migrated to the Indian sub-continent had the same physical needs and concerns as their Greek and Roman cousins of the West, once they had settled down in the Indo-Gangetic plain their attention focussed on the problem of evil and suffering. For them evil was not a mere absence or privation of some good, a fall from the ideal condition as for the Greeks, but a whole superstructure of our own selfish creation that hid the Real and obstructed the Good. Hence religion for them is not a search for the unknown God but a process around the illusory world man has constructed around himself.

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha's basic religious insight is *duhkha*: life itself is suffering! Suffering and evil are not just an aspect of an otherwise substantially good phenomenal world; man's phenomenal existence is essentially evil, constituted as it is by ignorance and its evolutes as we have explained above. But this is not a pessimistic outlook on life since the aim of the analysis is to enable one to take a free and detached outlook on life activities with the impartiality of an outside spectator. Once the emptiness and transitory character of the phenomenal world is brought out, the stream of consciousness that one is gains final release. This interdependent existence of the factors that constitute man's world of experience is the Buddhist religious doctrine or *dharma*, and Buddha who attained illumination regarding this real nature of things and reached liberation from them is the model for all to follow. But there are different grades or stages in this long process towards the attainment of liberation. The existence of such stages as those of the ordinary laity, the monks and nuns, those on the penultimate stage of liberation who have to come only once more into life, and finally the Arhats and Bodhisatvas who have actually reached liberation though still continuing in bodily existence for the sake of others, constitute the Buddhist *samgha* or fellowship of those moving towards final liberation.

In this perspective rational interpretation of religious doctrine has only a secondary importance. It is mainly intended to silence the critics and to give the faithful followers a confidence that holds them on the right track. But the main emphasis is on a meditative realization of the process itself. Religion is not mere knowledge, but practical exercise of gathering up one's dissipated powers and bringing them into proper focus to bring out the unreality and impermanent character of the world of experience. It is only a bubble that can burst and disappear at any moment, a mere shadow, dream, or mirage that has no reality of its own! To any elaboration of the knowledge of such a transitory world should be ascribed only the role of a play, the solving of a jigsaw puzzle!



The Hindu approach to rationality in faith is more positive than the Buddhist perspective. One may say that Hinduism takes up from where Buddhism left off, since its whole attempt is to explain the ultimate meaning of the stream of consciousness which an individual is. All the Hindu schools of thought, especially the six classical systems: the Vaiseshika, Nyaya, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta try to interpret rationally the basic religious experience. The Vaiseshika does it in terms of physical categories, Nyaya in categories of logical thinking, Sankhya through psychological archetypes, Yoga by means of ascetical techniques and Mimamsa using ritual, symbolism and language analysis.

But the best model of Hindu theologizing is presented by the Vedanta school. According to Vedantins the basic religious problem is ignorance and the only solution for it is the recognition of God as the ultimate ground and source of one's own self. All religious practices such as ritual, penance and worship of different Gods constitute only preparation for the inquiry into the nature of that Brahman, the ultimate source and primeval womb of all beings. According to Sankara the very way we conceive God is indicative of the abnormal condition in which our individual consciousness is. If God is absolute reality he has to be infinite and immutable consciousness as the Upanishads have defined Brahman. But in the perception of consciousness we cut up our world into opposing fields of I and thou, subject and object, radically different as light and darkness, day and night. God cannot be seen as an object since he would be only one object among objects, nor can he be thought of as an individual person since he would be only one individual among many. Such an objective characterisation of God will naturally deny the infinity of the divine reality. Hence the only way one can think of God is as the Self of one's own self.

The best rational method for arriving at such an understanding of God is not looking at him as a sort of

outside creator who produces beings additional to and outside of himself. A God who has anything outside of or additional to him is not really infinite and, therefore cannot be truly God. Similarly a supreme Form that makes duplicates of itself through participation cannot be infinite. That is why for the Greeks the most perfect Being was not infinite but finite and definite. They had to wait for the apophatism of Plotinus in order to deny the reality of all finite forms and rise to the unique reality of the One which could not admit any limitation or characterisation. For the Vedantins the approach to the divine Reality has to be indirect in the same way one perceives one's own self. One cannot see directly one's own self, but has to perceive it indirectly as the source of one's actions. In the same way Brahman the absolute and infinite reality should be considered as that primeval source from which beings take their origin, by the support of which they continue in existence and into which they return in their final dissolution. Another way of arriving at a knowledge of God is through Scripture which is an expression in human words of what the sages intuitively experienced concerning the divine reality. The value of Scripture is not merely as testimony of certain holy persons or even God himself, but as Word, which is meaning and implies rootedness in ultimate meaning. Word is its own testimony and by itself appeals to reason. These methods of approach as well as others like meditation, knowledge through action in ritual performance, and reasoning by analogy from one's experience should be employed synthetically in order to arrive at an integral experience of the divine. This can finally lead to intuitive experience of God as one's ultimate Self which is the final liberating knowledge.

### 3. Transformative value of Faith

If faith is deeply influenced and regulated in its expressions by the prevailing culture of the people, faith has on the other hand, also the capacity to break through traditional patterns and create its own culture. Here the place and role of Christian faith in relation to the world

cultures may be taken as a typical example. It was born in the Palestinian culture of Judaism, but broke loose from its ethnic geographical and cultural limitations to emerge as a universal Gospel in the Greek World. In the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries Christian faith showed that it transcended the Greek culture too. The same type of transcendence is evident in Christianity's encounter with the Indian culture.

Christian Gospel is universal and Christ asked his disciples to go and teach all nations: Still it was born in the context of the Palestinian culture using the symbols and idioms of Judaism, and it was a response to the basic concerns, aspirations and expectations of the Jewish people. For them religion itself was the covenant entered into by God with his own creatures, and creation of man, the partner of the divine covenant, was the creator's first instalment of his own side of the contract. "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."<sup>10</sup> There is only one true God, only one place for his worship, and Israel is the community of those who worship the true God<sup>11</sup>. Yahweh in the beginning created all things including man. The same Lord by miraculous deeds liberated Israel first from the slavery of Egypt and later from the Babylonian captivity. If one keeps in one's heart Yahweh's words and commandments and loves him with all one's heart He will grant final liberation<sup>12</sup>. That loving God is constantly in the midst of his people to save them through his Word. Christianity was proclaimed as the realization and fulfilment of these Old Testament expectations and promises: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God by mighty works and wonders and signs" was sent in fulfilment of God's promise made to David. You crucified him. "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses."<sup>13</sup> So now what is needed for salvation is to

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10. Deut. 12, 1-12; Lev. 26  
 11. Deut. 30, 11; 7, 8; 10, 15; 26, 6  
 12. Mt. 2: 22-36  
 13. Mt. 5: 48



believe in Jesus whom God has raised up as son and saviour, and to accept his word. Christ takes the place of Yahweh in the Old Testament and Christ's Gospel is God's Word. "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect",<sup>14</sup> said Christ repeating the Old Testament ideal of sanctity.

But this universal ideal of imitating the Father in loving the enemies, doing good to all without distinction, and blessing those who curse, required that one had to go beyond the narrow ethnic and geographical restrictions of Judaism. For the Jews the land of Palestine and especially Jerusalem were the symbol of God's promise of salvation. Christ, on the other hand said: "Believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem the true worshippers worship the Father...God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and Truth."<sup>15</sup> Besides Christ broke the strict framework of Jewish monotheism by showing that in the one Godhead, which was conceived as wholly the Other, there are three Persons intimately connected with man, as Father, Son and Paraclete: Salvation is not becoming free citizens in the Kingdom of God as a reward for the faithful observance of the covenant with God. It is to be completely inspired and directed by God's Spirit: For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. You have received the spirit of sonship by which you cry 'Abba', Father<sup>16</sup>.

When Christianity broke loose from the strings of Palestinian culture and entered the Greek world it had to leave behind the Jewish models for man's relationship with God, the covenant, the law, the Exodus and the Sabbath.

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14. *Jn* 4, 21-24

15. *Rom* 8, 14-17

16. *1 Tim* 2,5

In the Greek religio-cultural context the main concern was not keeping faithfully a contract with God or Gods, but rather finding a way for attaining the all perfect divine Good. Man, though a spiritual being acting rationally through his intellect and will, has only an imperfect participation in the absolute Good, gaining his knowledge from the material world of sense experience. So his intellect has to be led through intermediary ideas to the contemplation of all perfect Good. In religion, too, man tied down to the experience of material things has to be guided by intermediary beings, mystics, kings, gods, Logoi and spirits to a direct contemplation of and intimate union with the one supreme, infinite Good. In this perspective it was easy to think of Jesus Christ, the Word as an intermediary being, the blue-print of all things created, a storehouse of all ideas, something lower than God. Here again Christian faith had to engage in a long fight, lasting several centuries to break the restrictive framework of Greek thinking. St. Paul and St. John who preached the Gospel in the Greek World had to affirm that the Greek gods and intermediary beings were not really mediators, since they were neither Gods nor men. There is only one mediator between God and men, truly God and truly man, the Son of God, Jesus Christ<sup>17</sup>. He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation and the creator even of angels<sup>18</sup>. The Word about whom the Greeks spoke was in the beginning with God and was God. The henotheism of Greek philosophy was the cause, again, of the Asian and Eunomian heresies: Those who were strongly attached to the Greek hierarchical conception of beings insisted that Christ and the Holy Spirit were only intermediary beings lower in divinity than the absolute one. The Councils of Nicea and Constantinople II through their clumsy terminology insisted at all costs the simple Christian faith that in the one single divinity there are three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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17. Col. 1, 14-17

18. Jn 1, 1-3

The same kind of tension is seen in Christianity's encounter with Hinduism in our modern age. The main religious problem for the Indian religions is that of bondage arising out of ignorance about one's own authentic self and suffering arising out of that ignorance. The Hindu insight is that all reality is one alone without a second outside it. Brahman, the absolute reality is infinite immutable consciousness. If there were another outside of or additional to it, both of them would not be infinite, since one would lack what were unique and proper to the other. So the one way to liberation is to realize Brahman as the ground and self of all things, the self of one's own self. In comparison with the infinite reality of the Absolute the world of beings is unreal like a shadow, waves on the ocean, bubbles in water, a mirage, a dream, a production of divine magic. So the divine Trimurti, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva associated with the creation, preservation and final dissolution of the world are as illusory and relative as the world itself. So even though one may entertain a certain amount of concern for one's fellow-men within this relative world and practise devotion to the Gods, incarnations and the Trimurti itself in the final move to liberation one has to leave one's fellow human beings, gods, teachers and incarnations and attain the realization that one's only true self is the divine self.

Here again Christian thinkers like Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, who was a convert to Christianity from Hinduism felt the need to break out of the cultural straight jacket of Hindu thought. Christian faith encounters the Trinity of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit not in the relative reality of the phenomenal world but in the heart of the divinity itself. Within the divine essence Christian faith encounters the category of the person: Father who is a person identified himself with the whole divinity and gives the whole divinity to the Son, who in turn remaining the unique person of the Word communicates the same identical divinity to the Holy Spirit. This distinction and community of persons in the heart of one, immutable and indivisible divinity is the model and pattern for all human



relationships. Man's spiritual call is to encounter the Spirit as the inner controller and in and through the Spirit to encounter the Son, Jesus Christ and in and with him address the Father as Abba. This explains how divine Revelation is basically possible. Any manifestation of the incomprehensible and infinite divinity in finite forms of ideas, theophanies cannot bring us to realization of the true divinity; these can only turn and direct our attention to the infinite beyond them. The real revelation of God occurred in Jesus Christ. When he rose from the dead the disciples realized that the teacher they loved and conversed with was not an ordinary man, but the one who is truly the Son of God. Through the realization of his personality they encountered the Father and the Paraclete. This, again assigns lasting value to human relationships in the world. The goal of Christian religion is not an escape from the world, but rather an escape with the world. The procession of the Word as Son was continued into the phenomenal world in his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth, and the sending of the Holy Spirit from the bosom of the divinity as Gift and Love contained in the outpouring of the Spirit into human hearts. The end of religion is not merely attaining an experience of God but proceeding from that experience to transform the world into God's Kingdom. For the scope of the divine plan of salvation is to reconstitute all things under Christ, the new head of humanity. Hence the love of one's neighbour is not a temporary step to be practised until all individualities disappear and the one Self be realized in all. Each person is unique as a child of God, and is to be loved and served for his unique existence, that will continue into all eternity. Only with such a radical break of the Hindu cultural structure can Christian faith express itself in traditional Indian idioms and categories. Though faith can be expressed only in the categories of a particular culture, it has also a dynamism that transcends the limitations and particularities of every culture.

#### 4. Towards a World Theology

These different aspects of reasoning conditioned by culture in its approach to faith are of fundamental importance today, when interreligious dialogue has entered a new phase. The different churches and even religions are not viewed as competing ideologies demanding the total allegiance of the same people, but rather as complementary ways for arriving at an adequate understanding of the origin, nature and meaning of human existence and of human society, reasons and roots of suffering, and other questions engaging the consciousness of humanity. People have come to realize the human dimension of religions and acknowledge the fact that the more diverse are the ways available for approaching the divine the better the ineffable may be understood. The intimate involvement of the human consciousness in the truth it perceives is another reason for the converging religious faith of humanity. Religious formulations and propositions are not absolutes; belief systems and traditions have no value unless accepted by conscious beings. Rational beings cannot accept ideas and systems except under the aspects of truth and good. No one can accept evil or falsehood for its own sake. Any error lives in the minds of those who accept it on account of the element of truth trapped in it. Hence the effective way of fighting error is recognizing and liberating the truth factor hidden in the particular erroneous system. On the other hand, even the most perfect religion is not absolute truth, but is characterised by various limitations, social, cultural, political and the like, and therefore needs liberation in interaction with other truth systems. Besides, religious problems and religious truths are universal. Sin and evil affect all people and if there is a God He is also for the atheist, and if that God is really triune that divine reality is Trinity also for the Unitarians. Hence there is need for taking seriously into account the insights of all religions in discussing the nature of God, the ways of divine Revelation to man, the nature of human salvation and the role of the Saviour and the rest.

The best way to build up all humanity into one People of God and to initiate a dialogue of religions is not theoretically discussing the doctrinal differences of religions. Doctrines and principles are indeed important, but they are only abstractions and summarised formulations. When such formulations whether philosophical or religious are taken as the point of departure for religious discussions the fact that they are historically and culturally conditioned is easily forgotten and the head on confrontation of opposing formulations becomes inevitable. No one can be asked to compromise what one holds as true, since such compromise will be a betrayal of truth itself. The way out of this difficult situation is to go back to the context of such formulations, namely the service of the least of one's brethren in daily life where faith is actually lived and practised. In facing together in the light of religious faith the problems of humanity today, the unity and communion of all the children of the Father in heaven becomes apparent and the different ways of formulating that unity become flexible enough. In this way alone can reason serve faith in a way to enrich and strengthen it rather than reduce it to mere psychological and sociological factors and destroy religion itself.

C. M. I. Provincial House  
Trivandrum 695 014

John B. Chethimattam



## Ramanuja's Devotional Approach to Spirituality

Among the various approaches to religion and spiritual life, Ramanuja's *bhaktimarga* or devotional approach has a unique place in the history of religions. Among the theistic approaches to religion, one can claim that Ramanuja presents the best synthesis. Born at Perumpadur in the district of Chingalpet some thirty six miles south of Madras in the year A. D. 1017 Ramanuja had a long and fruitful life since he passed away only in 1137 at the mature age of one hundred and twenty. Early in life he was initiated into Vedantic studies and had as teacher an Advaitin, Yadadavaprakasha. Since he could not find satisfaction in the Advaitic philosophy Ramanuja broke away from his teacher and approached for instruction a sage called Mahapurnan and under his direction he decided to form a religious philosophy based on a devotionistic approach to God. Though he was married, attracted by the ideal of *sannyasa* he left his wife and family and entered a life of austere penance and gained for himself the title of *yati-rajah*, king of ascetics.

### Ramanuja's Vedantadarsanam

The Vedanta school of Ramanujacharya is known as *Visishtadvaita*. For, he also admits with Sankara and the Advaitins that reality is *a-dvaitam*, non-dual. But this non-dual reality has, according to Ramanuja certain *vise-shanas* or attributes. Though Brahman is the one reality without a second, world and men too are real, but only as attributes and manifestations of that one Brahman: *Cit* or consciousness that is the underlying support of living things and *acit* or matter, the basis of non-living things, are two inseparable aspects of Brahman, in the perspective

of Visishtadvaita philosophy. In the Advaita philosophy of Sankaracharya, Brahman alone has reality, and everything else appearing in the phenomenal world are unreal: *Brahmasatyam, jaganmithya*: Brahman is truth and the world is illusory. The individual souls and material things are only superimpositions on the qualityless (*nirguna*) Brahman, like shadows, reflections, dreams, mirages, waves and bubbles. In Ramanuja's view, on the other hand, both *cit* and *acit* are real and eternal, but inseparable from (*aprthaksiddhi*) and completely controlled by Brahman. They cannot originate or subsist by themselves. True knowledge that liberates man from the present state of bondage, according to Ramanuja, is the realization that the souls and the world are not autonomous entities but eternally dependent on Brahman as his attributes and body. Ramanuja's main concern in his *Sri Bhashya*, the commentary on the Vedantasutras and his other works like *Vedarthasamgraha* and *Gitabhashyam* is to show how this philosophical understanding can be translated into true devotion to the divine Lord.

The very opening sentence of *Sri Bhashya* brings out his devotionalist approach: "May my mind be filled with devotion towards the highest Brahman, the abode of Lakshmi; who is luminously revealed in the Upanishads: who in sport produces, sustains and reabsorbs the entire universe; whose only aim is to foster the manifold classes of beings that humbly worship him."<sup>1</sup>

### **Brahmavidya and Bhakti**

One who has performed faithfully the rites, customs and traditions prescribed in the *karmakanda* or the action section of the Veda, shall realize that the fruits of such pious works are not permanent, and will, therefore, desire to know Brahman. Thereby his attention will turn to the *jnanakanda*, the knowledge section, namely the Upanishads. The Upanishads state clearly that the fruits of works are

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1. See *Sri Bhashya*, I, 1 Introd. SBE vol. 48 p. 3

impermanent, and that only knowledge of Brahman can produce lasting results. Chandogya Upanishad states: "As here on earth the world which is earned by work perishes, even so there the world which is earned by merit derived from the performance of sacrifices perishes. Those who depart hence without having found here the Atman and those real desires, for them there is no real freedom in all the worlds. But those who depart hence, having found the Atman and those real desires - for them in all the worlds there is freedom."<sup>2</sup> "Not through the transient things is that abiding One reached", says the Kathopanishad<sup>3</sup>. In the words of the Mundaka Upanishad "Unsteady, verily, are these boats of the eighteen sacrificial forms which are said to be inferior karma. The deluded who delight in this as leading to good, fall again into old age and death."<sup>4</sup>

So a true Brahmin must arrive at non-attachment by abandoning the worlds won by works. That world which is not made is not won by what is done. So for the sake of this liberating knowledge he must approach with sacrificial fuel in hand a teacher who is learned in the Scriptures and established in Brahman. To him who has approached in the prescribed manner, and whose mind is tranquil and who has attained peace, let the knowing teacher impart in very truth the knowledge about Brahman by which one knows the Imperishable, the True."<sup>5</sup>

Good works only help towards the acquisition of knowledge of Brahman. Knowledge requires inner purity, which, however, cannot by itself produce knowledge. Along with the acquisition of inner purity one must try to understand the Vedanta teaching through *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. 1) *Śravaṇa* is listening to the Guru's words interpreting the meaning of Vedanta statements.

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2. *Chandogya Up.* VIII, i, 6

3. *Ibid* I, ii, 10

4. *Mundaka Up.* I, 2, 7

5. *Ibid* I, 2, 12-13



Guru must be one who has attained an inner realization of the Vedic truths. 2) *Manana* is reflecting by oneself, on the truths taught by the Guru making them one's own. 3) *Nididhyasana* is the laborious process of fixing in one's mind through continuous meditation the truths one has grasped. Through this constant effort age-old deposit of karma in one's soul is removed, ignorance is lifted and the illusion that one is other than and additional to Brahman is dissipated, and one arrives at the realization that Reality is One.

### The nature of Brahmanidya

Realization of Brahman is not a mere knowledge of the meaning of Scriptural texts; mere intellectual knowledge is incapable of removing ignorance. Only knowledge in the form of *upasana* or worship can produce real knowledge. The knowledge of the meaning of Scriptural texts is only a preparation for that knowledge. This is clearly stated in the Upanishads. Mundaka Upanishad says: "He in whom the sky, the earth and the interspace are woven as also the mind along with all the vital breaths, knows him alone as the one Atman...Where the arteries of the body are brought together like the spokes in the centre of a wheel, within it this Atman moves about becoming manifold. Meditate on the AUM as the Atman."<sup>6</sup> According to the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad this Atman alone is to be seen, to be heard, to be reflected upon, and to be meditated upon<sup>7</sup>. Here the primary injunction given is meditation, and other details are only supporting reasons. In Vedantic texts *jnana* and *dhyana* are often used with equal meaning. So Ramanuja's conclusion is that Brahman-jnana is Brahmapasana, devout meditation on Brahman.

### What is Brahmapasana?

According to Ramanuja, steady remembrance uninterrupted like flowing oil is meditation. Brahman who is the

6. *Ibid* II. 2, 5-6

7. *Brih. Up*, IV, v, 6

self of all is the object of this loving meditation: The Upanishad says: "This Atman is the lord, beneficial, the real, the terrible, the lord of creation, the creator of all... Him verily one should desire to know...He who has all forms, the golden one. He who knows this which has both the forms of breath and the sun, as his Atman, sacrifices only to the Atman."<sup>8</sup> With the achievement of this constant remembrance all one's bonds are loosened. It is equivalent to an intuitive experience of one's own self. But one has to realize that this Atman cannot be attained by instruction nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing. He is to be attained only by one whom the Atman chooses. To such a one the Atman reveals its own nature<sup>9</sup>.

Who is chosen in this way? One who is most beloved to the Atman; Atman loves the one who loves the Atman. The Lord says in the Bhagavad Gita: "To these men who are ever integrated and commune with me in love I give that integration of the soul by which they may draw nigh to me."<sup>10</sup> "The man of wisdom, ever integrated, who loves and worships the One alone excels; for to the man of wisdom I am exceeding dear and he is dear to me."<sup>11</sup> So one who loves the Supreme through constant remembrance and seeks it above all things attains the Supreme. This constant remembrance is love or devotion: loving meditation is bhakti or devotion.

### Bhaktisadhanas or aids to devotion

Ramanuja indicates seven aids in one's movement towards continuous remembrance of the Lord. All these are aimed at securing purity of mind, since continuous meditation on God is possible only with a pure mind.

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8. *Maitr. Up.* VI, 8-9

9. *Katha UP.* I, ii, 23

10. *Bhagavad Gita* X, 10

11. *Ibid* VII, 17

1. *Viveka* or discernment. By this is meant discrimination among food substances in view of achieving and maintaining purity of the body. If the food is pure, the body is pure; if the body is pure mind is pure; and if the mind is pure, constant remembrance of God becomes possible. Purity of food depends on several factors: a) Certain food substances are considered impure by themselves, e.g. garlic. b) Food given by impure people like prostitutes and public sinners is impure. c) Food can be rendered impure by contact, like things partly eaten by crows or dogs or other animals, and even by contact of sight as food looked at by impure people<sup>1,2</sup>. One who wishes to grow in bhakti must abstain from impure food substances.

2. *Vimoka*. It is freedom from sense pleasures achieved by conquering passion, anger, infatuation and hatred, which are the main obstacles to spiritual growth.

3. *Abhyasa* or practice is concentrating the mind continuously on God. It is also called *Iswarapranidhana*, worship of Iswara. This unchanging concentration can be gained only by long practice.

4. *Kriya* or action is the fulfilment of the fivefold duties, consisting of a) study of Sacred Scripture, b) sacrifice to the gods, c) offerings for the departed, d) providing food for animals and birds, and e) hospitality towards guests.

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12. Here what is involved is not merely the dietary qualities of food substances. Purity-impurity and auspicious - inauspicious are two sets of basic value categories in Hindu thought. What is pure belongs to the *sattva* guna, while the impure stands for the *tamoguna*. Since this pair belongs to the Yoga concept of liberation, purity in all respects is required in the move towards liberation. Auspiciousness belongs to *rajoguna* and is necessary for the realization of the goal of *artha* and *kama* coupled with *dharma* in this life. A king is auspicious at all times since he is the symbol of wealth and power. A *devadasi* or temple prostitute is impure owing to her way of life but auspicious on account of her dedication to the service of the deity.



5. *Kalvana* or practice of virtues like truthfulness, compassion, charity and non-violence.
6. *Anavasada* or freedom from despair even in the face of failure and suffering.
7. *Anuddharsha* or absence of haughtiness even in victory and joy. One should keep one's modesty and equanimity at all times

Bhakti, as the very literal meaning of the term indicates, is a "sharing" in the divine object of one's devotion, practising all the virtues and qualities proper to the status of divine beings. Hence even the gods are said to be jealous of one who makes continuous progress in devout life and they may tempt him with worldly goods in order to thwart his attempt to reach divine perfection.

### **Bhakti leads to union with God**

Once an individual has moved beyond mere desire to know Brahman and has attained true devotion to God all his efforts are transformed into acts of self-surrender. By God's grace he will attain faith and gain the realization that Brahman is the soul, and the devotee his body. The bhakta comes to understand that Iswara dwells in him as the inner controller and then he turns into himself and meditates on the indwelling Iswara thus: "I am you, and you are me." Thus through brahmopasana or worship of Brahman one is transformed into Brahma form. The finite *jiva* or soul becomes limitless possessing the attributes of Brahman. But what is finally attained is not absolute identity: though Brahman dwells in me, I am not Brahman. What is achieved is extreme intimacy and unitive consciousness.

Love removes the inequality between Brahman and the soul in existence and activity. It is as if Iswara left his iswarahood and lordship, and the bhakta on his part abandoned his ignorance and dependence on works and entered into an inseparable companionship with the Lord.

The barriers of distance between the Lord and the devotee are removed, sinful tendencies are destroyed and the fear of being separated from the Lord disappears. Bhakti becomes its own end culminating in total surrender of the soul to the Lord, since it accepts him as its sole goal and means.

At its deeper level *upasana* or devotion becomes *prema* or intimate love, full fervour and unshakable fidelity. This state is described by Ramanuja as *paramaikantiam*, supreme identity. It is the soul's unwavering love for the Lord who is its ground and director. The devotee realizes that since the Lord is his very support he cannot be separated from the ground of his very being, in the same way as light is inseparable from its source, as sun's rays from the sun.

At the climax of bhakti the desire to see the Lord becomes compelling. One is no more satisfied with the Lord's words or his promises nor with a vision of the Lord from a distance but craves for the bliss of eternal union. In that state the devout soul yearns for fellowship and union with the supreme Lord. Abandoning his individuality completely the bhakta sees identification with the Lord, the sole desirable goal. The Lord too loves the bhakta who loves him, and the loving Lord and the beloved soul attain unity in the state of liberation.

This ideal of bhakti and *upasana* proposed by Ramanuja can be seen as a mystical union with God, beyond mere concepts and intellectual understanding. It is the total surrender of the finite into the bosom of the Infinite, of the part into the whole. This devotional approach goes beyond a religion of works or the purely metaphysical understanding of philosophers. It conceives the rational being's approach to God as a total, integrative and conscious self surrender of the free human being to the Lord who is the ground and support of all beings.

J. Manickath

St. Thomas Pontifical institute  
Vadavathoor.

# Indian Culture as a Theological Base

Theology as man's language about God is a cultural expression of his experience of God. The experience is also indicative of his faith in and commitment to God and other God-related realities. But from a theological point of view both experience and its expressions are culturally conditioned. The cultural conditioning, however, would affect extensively the life of the people with respect to their ancestral faith, traditions, customs, artistic genius, literary genres, thought-patterns, imageries and symbol-systems. In this way any culture anywhere in the world would serve as a theological base (*locus theologicus*) for a meaningful interpretation of the faith of a people. Indian culture with all its religious, philosophical, artistic, theological and spiritual wealth would serve better the Christian Revelation to interpret itself more meaningfully to the people of India and thereby integrate the human wealth of our natural religiosity unto the fullness of Christ's universal redemption that is yet to be realized as a continuous process of human integration of cultural values with the Christian experience of faith.

## Theology as inculturation of revelation

Theological interpretation of Christian Revelation had always been in the context of some dominating cultural setting, Jewish, Syrian, Greek, Egyptian (Alexandrian), Roman, Germanic, Spanish and Frankish, to name a few. In this sequence why not also an Indian theological hermeneutics of Christian Revelation and an Indian style of faith experience and expression? This is the crucial question to Christian existence and witnessing in our independent India. Revelation as God's communicative Word for mankind in general had actually been transmitted in and through



the cultural media of a particular people in history at a particular time and place. These particularities of time, place, culture, language and symbols cannot have such perennality as they were not comprehensive of all times, places and cultures. Hence every theological hermeneutics has to be, by nature and function, a new inculturation-process of the Revelation in a given cultural setting, lived, experienced and expressed by a people. This points to the possibility of theological pluralism corresponding to the plurality of cultures to which Revelation is relayed or proclaimed anew. Every theology is a transcultural interpretation of one and the same historical Revelation initiated by God and completed in and through Jesus Christ at the kairological moment related to the space-time coincidence of the Christ-event. Only the event is unique and irrepitative; the interpretations depend on the variety of experience of the witnesses of the event. This is true also in the case of theologies which are nothing but interpretations of the experiential content of the event. In the theological process a particular history is transcended making the revelation itself transhistorical while making its content more cosmic, more universal and more open to the wider humanity existing beyond the boundaries of the revelational event. Theology in this way is an inculturation-process of Revelation.

### **The dynamics of inculturation**

Theology as a process of inculturating Divine Revelation into a new cultural milieu, and for that matter, Indian culture for example, may imply the following factors that may interact on each other: respect and appreciation of the encountering culture; sympathetic understanding of the cultural limitations of Revelation itself; right understanding of the positive cultural value systems of the given culture, setting it in the total perspective of the human heritage, no matter under what colour these manifest themselves to the theologian; recognition of the identity-marks of the new culture and a readiness to preserve them for their own good and on

their own rights and not out of the grace of the theologian himself. A theologian is a servant of human culture and not its dictator. As a servant of what God himself planted and nurtured for a section of humanity in some part of the planet Earth a theologian must be an interlocutor between God and the men of a given culture with the sincere intention to make God's Word more intelligible to the people in their own words, as it happened on the first Pentecost when people belonging to various language groups heard the Apostles speaking in their respective languages about the wonderful works of God (Acts. 2:6-11).

As a scientific discipline theology too is a systematic discourse on people's lived experience about God. The data of experience can be articulated only in and through the cultural symbols of the people who experience the Divine. But the cultural symbols vary from people to people. A theologian need not feel worried about this fact as it is the case with his own cultural pattern if he is a foreigner to the given culture. Perhaps the first task of a foreign theologian is to understand sympathetically and critically, positively and valuationally, the meaning and message of the symbol-system of the new culture of which he is going to be a theologian. In this process of understanding caution must be taken on his part that he is not prejudiced over the strangeness of the new culture which he is inclined to relativise in relation to and in comparison with his own culture which he is tempted to posit as the criterion for measuring the valuational function of the other culture. Missionary expeditions of Europeans and Americans to the East and Far Eastern countries have often been alienating the people of those countries from their own culture under the prejudice that the foreign missionaries' culture was superior to the native cultures. It eventually led to the rejection of the foreign missionaries from the same countries. It has been tragic and it will continue to be so if the foreign theologians' attitude to our culture is not turned towards a positive and creative synthesis on sound principles of

theological pluralism which was the right theological process from the very apostolic times. Perhaps the greatest scandal for such 'imperialistic' and 'neo-colonialistic' theologians must be that of the *kenosis* of Jesus Christ himself: He should not have condescended to the level of a slave, taking the form of a man, leaving the "Royal Throne of the Almighty"!! One forgets for a moment that the symbol of the "Royal Throne" is fashioned to suit the taste of a people who were fascinated by David's Throne or enslaved to glorify the Persian Throne or the Roman Caesar's Capitol.

The theological inculturation of Revelation also includes the theologian's personal life-participation in the living experience of the people's culture. A theologian may not succeed in his venture if he is only an on-looker on the scene of the cultural activities of the people for whom he is a theologian. He must be a man of meditation, intuiting upon the mysterious presence of the Divine in the realities of the people. He has to be a sharer in the struggles of the life of the people, a prophet, a guide, a philosopher and a theologian as well. A theologian cannot be satisfied with formulating neat propositions on the Dogmas as substitutes to the already existing old formulae which are apparently irrelevant and unintelligible to the common people as well as to the élite who belong to a different cultural milieu today. A theology in the Indian situation of abject poverty, exploitation, enslavement and corruption, must be liberation oriented. A Theologian must be a man of action himself and an animator for another to act properly with the right understanding of the purport of the message of Revelation. Just as he has to listen to the prophetic challenges of the prophet Isaias of old he will have to listen to the poetic insights of poet Tagore who challenged the self-complacent *Pujāri* of the temple in the following rhythm:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of  
beads: Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark  
corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine

eyes and see thy God is not before thee. He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in Sun and in shower and His garment is covered in dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him, come down on the dusty soil. Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our Master Himself has joyfully taken upon Him the bonds of creation: He is bound with us all for ever. Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense; What harm is there if thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet Him and stand by Him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

(*Gitanjali*, 11)

Theological inculturation is not to be confined to conceptualization of religious experience alone. It has to take into account the total content of the life of the people. This includes not only religious or spiritual realm but the entire human realm where man is struggling with the problems of life, misery, hard work, scarcity of food and other basic means of life such as shelter, health, education, privileges in old age, job and just wage system. Can a theologian in the Indian context honestly plead for the liberation of the bonded labourers and act upon his pleading boldly and stand for the cause of the oppressed with his clear theological vision of justice and freedom which he might have drawn very convincingly from Revelation? If he is prepared to act upon his theology of justice and freedom he might be inculturating the message of Revelation into the life of the people. Otherwise he will remain like many others of the past colonial times as self-styled theologian for nobody and for no cause.

### **Indian theology based on Indian Christian experience of the Acts of Love**

Theologizing in India should not be an arm-chair reflection on some abstract dogmatic truth which we are often given to believe to be the only form of truth that



matters for faith. But a faith that is not translated into acts of charity is no authentic faith. This is an equally emphatic Christian affirmation we find in St. James' letter. This points to the need of giving equal or more emphasis to the Christian experience centered around authentic Christian action for the real life of people, without which their human life itself is in danger and not to speak about their "salvation of souls" and "eternal life". Hence I am inclined to suggest that our primary source of theologizing in India cannot be the Revelation that is contained in the Christian Scriptures alone, but also in the revelation of the realities of human life in this country. Our future theology cannot be validated by the testimonies of the "Fathers of the Church" who are no more living witnesses to our struggle for faith. In the same way our theology cannot simply be equated with the comfortable systematization of thoughts patterned according to the logic of Aristotle or Bertrand Russel or Edmund Husserl or Heidegger; and for that matter neither formed on the pattern of St. Thomas Aquinas nor on the model of Karl Rahner. Their methods do not have much relevance for us today except for system-building. Ours is not a system-building exigency but rather a problem-solving urgency: This urgency is felt on all frontiers of human life here in India - on our relationship with our non-Christian believers, who seem to profess and practise much more seriously the interior dimension of religions and committed more and more to the nation-building process for a better future of the Indian mass of poor people; where communal tensions, pluralistic religious claims of various absolutist lines of spiritual liberation, exist and so much of popular piety sways over the conscience of the larger section of the illiterate masses, Christian theologizing cannot be an idle past-time. It must be an involved experiential act of faith expressed in sincere collaboration with all men of good will set in motion in view of the total liberation of all humans united in some common basic faith which gives mutual trust for a life of tolerance, co-existence and harmony. We don't want to kill one another in the name of God and save nobody. So also we

do not favour the killing of some to save some of us or some others of our choice. We rather should stand at all cost to save all our human brethren, Christian or Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, Parsi or Punjabi. Can we evolve a theology of such wider Christian experience of a common brotherhood of humans and a common Fatherhood of God? This might be our future Indian Christian theological concern.

The time of religious confrontation and apologetics has ceased to be significant any more. Ours is a time that expects from us as well as from our non-Christian neighbours a certain sincere participation in the religious concerns of everybody. This alone will help us to live together, grow together and build together and never destroy one another.

### A Theology of "Dialogue and Collaboration"

It seems that the proper time has come for us to plan for a theology of "Dialogue and Collaboration" in the spirit of the teaching of Vatican II so well expressed in the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate* art. 2):

...The Church exhorts her sons that *through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions* carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they *recognize, preserve, and promote the good things, spiritual and moral as well as the socio-cultural values* found among these men.

This is a piece of advice of the Magisterium of the Church which is open towards the integration of human cultures for the better understanding and development of the common values of our human heritage inspite of our diversity of experience and expression. But to put this advice into action-form we require a greater degree of self-consciousness and self-respect over our own cultural heritage. We Christians ourselves need develop a depth experience of our own identity of our cultural maturity which is at

the same time open to assimilate and absorb healthy value-systems from our neighbouring civilizations and modern technological exchanges for effective actions. We Christians need not feel shy to assimilate any cultural value that is coming from any corner of the world provided that it gets easily fused with our own basic faith experience enriching it and never impoverishing it. "Let truth come from any corner of the world". This old cultural maxim of our heritage should govern also our Christian vision about the possibility of assimilating the so called non-christian cultural values in view of getting into serious and sincere theological dialogue with men of other religions. Why don't we learn to live in this planet as members of one religious family, the head of which is the One Lord of the Universe, call him by any name that suits to one's cultural appetite? To answer this question positively we will have to accept each other's religious dimension and dignity of humanity on a higher plane of universality over all particularities, not destroying these but allowing them to co-exist and coincide with one another in a mutually tolerating situation of sympathy and, if possible, empathy.

Our theology, in whatever form it shapes itself, should not be an alienating force for the Christians as against the Hindu or Muslim brethren, rather it must serve as a unifying force. This cannot be achieved except by means of an attitude of fellowship in religious experience which we have to create honestly and sincerely with the sole purpose of witnessing to the true Christian sense of brotherhood among peoples who accept the obedience to the One Reality under some name of their choice for reasons of their cultural and sociological exigency. Our culture, which is by nature pluralistic is a very congenial breeding ground for such a dialogical theology. A dialogical theology may very well start discussing with the relevance of the variety of religious experience and expression of a multi-religious locality and find meaningful ways of interaction and collaboration for fostering communal harmony, concerted action-programme for the integral development of the community.

The right motivation for developing a dialogical Christian theology in India is our common concern for creating and maintaining a real human fellowship with all members of a pluralistic religious community which has some basic faith content that can interlink and consolidate many divergent factors. The acceptance of God and His abiding presence and action in human life is one of such interlinking forces of faith. What is left then as a felt need is a common language about God (*theos-logia*). The development of this theology depends on the urgency of interpreting the content of the faith that is shared by all on the ground of the common commitments to the common problems of the people. In such case the issues of theologizing will not be pure dogmatics but pragmatics. The issues of human suffering, lack of unity and concord, urgency for honesty, integrity of human contracts, need for unified action, development, freedom and many other concrete problems of actual community life in a pluralistic society would need inspiring theological expositions convincingly treated in view of fostering common fellowship for creative human action which itself is really Christian in its concept and content. This was the primary task of Jesus himself as could be understood from the plain talk of the Evangelists. It is time for us to rediscover this fundamental theological concern of Jesus the Messiah and continue to interpret it theologically together with all relevant humanizing elements of our Christian proclamation and emphasize the significance of Christ's Peace-message today more than ever. The Gospel has to be made again as "Good News of Peace" to "men of good will", especially to peoples who live in warring situation of mutual distrust, tensions, terrorism, in human oppression and communal disharmony.

### Christian theologizing: pilgrimage in common experience

A Christian theologian in India today needs to be a pilgrim who is in sincere search for the truth that is unifying, liberating and integrating all that is true, holy, beautiful, honourable and lovely in the life of people



(Phil. 4:8). He has to be on the humble pursuit of integrating into his thoughts and actions "whatever truth and grace that are to be found among the people as a sort of secret presence of God, freeing them from all stains of evil while restoring them to Christ"... "And so, whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of people or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, not only is not lost but is healed, uplifted, and perfected for the glory of God" (cf. Decree on the Mission, art.9). These summary statements articulating the broader vision of the Church concerning her readiness to integrate everything both divine and human unto a higher perfection to be realized in the one Fatherhood of God through the integrative actions of Christ are right pointers for our theological pilgrimage.

In our theological enterprise a sincere participation in the religiosity of our non-Christian brethren becomes a *sine qua non* for our integral grasp of Revelation itself. Hence theologizing in the context of a pluralistic religiosity turns to be an inter-religious and inter-faith experience of the Ultimate Truth which enlightens all men revealing Itself in various ways and diverse forms. Our Christian theological task, therefore, seems to be a humble one: to be a pilgrim in search for a more christian experience of the One who is also common to all.

Dharmaram College  
Bangalore 560029

Thomas Manickam

## **Shariat, the Islamic Approach to Faith**

Islam is often accused of being a dry legalistic religion. In fact, from the very first Islam was conceived as a recall to the true Scriptures, the Book, the literal, living Word of God, which Christians and Jews were presumed to have corrupted in their different ways through neglect and malice. Muhammad said explicitly that in the Qur'an was contained the true reproduction of the archetypal Scriptures and that it was all the guidance man needed for proper relation with God. No intermediary (other than, of course, the prophet Muhammad) should stand between God and man, since any such intermediary, be he Christ or an angel or a human being, would be direct derogation of God's unity and unicity. To all appearance Islam is essentially a legal religion and nothing is left to the believer's free will or initiative. But in spite of this apparent legalism, Islam holds a great fascination for the common people, incapable of the hair-splitting distinctions of jurisprudence. It provides them with inspiration for a life of faith and conscientious obedience to God's law. Down the centuries Islam developed a theology that integrated the complex details of religious life and evolved even a genuine strand of mysticism. Hence Islam's approach to faith is of great value in the comparative study of religions.

### **Insistence on Fundamentals**

The secret of Islam's great influence on the common people is that it focusses attention on certain basic truths, especially the unity of God, man's obligation to obey his commands, respect for the sacred Scriptures in which the Word of God is communicated, the role of the prophet,

and man's obligation to help his neighbour. The famous *shahada* (Islamic creed), "La ilaha ill 'llah, muhammadun rasuly' llah: there is but one God, Muhammad is the prophet of God", is a sort of summary of Islam, though the combination of the two parts of the statement is found nowhere in the Qur'an. The best approximation to this creed is Sura IV, 135: "O ye who believe, believe in God and his prophet and the book which he has sent down to his prophet and the Scriptures which he has sent down formerly."

Even the apparently legalistic approach is based on the primary intention of Muhammad to provide the illiterate Arabs of his day with clear directives for their behaviour. Theoretical discussions and philosophical principles are of little use to the ordinary man. They only serve to confuse him. Islamic concept of *Shar'ia*, law was the most comprehensive one embracing all aspects of life, presenting an integral view of human religious life.

The principal source of *shar'ia* is the Qur'an, a document that aims at organizing the life of people on the basis of God's loving providence for humanity. Fazlur Rahman states: "The most intense impression that the Qur'an as a whole leaves upon a reader is not of a watchful, frowning and punishing God as the Christians have generally made it out to be, nor of a chief judge as the Muslim legalists have tended to think, but of a unitary, purposive will creative of order in the universe."<sup>1</sup> According to Rahman the most significant term in the Qur'an revelatory of the divine nature is *amr*, order, orderliness, which is communicated to everything created integrating it to the cosmic order. Qur'an takes into account the two dimensions of human nature, his basic weakness, sinfulness and corruption on the one hand, and his capacity for greatness on the other. When God was about to create man, the angels are said to have raised their voice in protest saying that he

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1. Fazlur Rahman. *Islam* 2nd ed. Chicago Univ. Press, 1979 p. 39

would be prone to evil and that he would corrupt and bloody the earth. But God replied to them: "I have knowledge of which you do not know."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Qur'an reports that when God offered the 'Trust' the entire creation except man refused to accept it; man alone came forward recklessly and accepted it<sup>3</sup>.

### The humaneness of Shar'ia

Islamic *shar'ia* emphasizes all the tensions in human nature, since these are necessary for creative human action. Islamic injunction of *jihad* is a typical example in this respect. The Qur'anic idea of *jihad* was a call "to surrender your properties and yourselves in the path of Allah" and its purpose was in turn "to establish the Islamic way of life in the members of Islam. But in later Islam it was interpreted as a sanction to impose Islamic culture and rule on other people, and the fanatic Kharjites went to the extent of declaring it one of the pillars of Islam. Other schools, on the other hand, have played it down on account of the swift expansion of Islam in proportion to the internal consolidation of the Islamic community of faith<sup>4</sup>.

A major source of the *shar'ia*, along with the Qur'an, is the *Hadith* or tradition which was the fruit of a particular religious methodology that provided directives to the moral life of people in the absence of the living guidance of the Prophet and of the earliest generation of his companions. These traditions were subsequently compiled in a series of works, six of which composed in the 3rd/9th century came to be accepted as authoritative<sup>5</sup>. Practical norms or the model behaviour contained in the *Hadith* was the *Sunna*, which literally means the "trodden

2. Qur'an II, 30

3. *Ibid.* XXXIII, 72

4. Fazlur Rahman. *Islam*, p. 37

5. *Ibid.* p, 43



path'' and was used by the pre-Islamic Arabs to denote the model established by the forefathers of a tribe. The difference between the Hadith and the Sunna is that the former is a mere theoretical report, while the Sunna is the same report invested with a normative quality.

Besides the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet, Islamic Shar'ia admitted two other foundations, the *Ijma* or consensus of the people and *Qiyas* or analogical reasoning. *Ijma*' or consensus is an ongoing process since original thinking or *ijtihad* carried on through systematic reasoning is a sort of mediator between the traditions of the Sunna and the common agreement of the believers. By its very nature *Ijma* is the most potent factor in expressing and shaping the complex of belief and practice of Muslims. Yet it is also the most elusive factor if the way it is formed is examined. It can be called a common sense perception of faith lived out in the daily experience, or even explained as enlightened public opinion.

### Comprehensive nature of Sha'ria

In the Islamic perspective shar'ia is a very comprehensive word, the high way of good life, expressing religious values functionally and in concrete terms to direct man's life. Shar'ia is closely allied to the term *Din*, which is the actual following of the way from the part of man, whereas shar'ia is the ordering of the way from the side of God. The great merit of Islam is that it established a definite methodology for reconciling and harmonizing the human and divine elements in the observance of the law. In the pre-speculative and pre-controversial period, law had two elements, *fiqh*, reason and '*ilm*, tradition which were considered complementary. In the early Muslim attitude there was very little distinction between reason and revelation, and between reason and shar'ia. But with the development of rational theology known as *Kalam* and the introduction of Neo-Platonic reasoning by Sufism, there was formulated a sharp cleavage between reason, shar'ia

and the mystic 'truth'. The Mu'tzilite method used by the Kalam was founded on certain fundamental doctrines taken for granted. These included the assertion of the unity of God, justice and righteousness or man's free will and responsibility for his actions, and the promise and threat, i.e., the paradise and the hell. Everything else was deduced from these basic truths. The Mu'tzilites debated whether the Qu'ran, the Word of God was eternal or created, and in politics maintained an intermediary position between contending parties<sup>6</sup>.

The rightwing orthodoxy always tried to keep ethics, theology and law within the concept of shar'ia placing the focus in the power and will of God. Moral principles, legal prescriptions and theological speculation itself had to be viewed as expressions of the one divine will. Starting with the 8th century the Kharjites and the Murjites gave greater prominence to rational speculation. The followers of Al Ash'ari in the 10th century isolated theology from law and morality. Al Ghazali in the 12th century, acclaimed as the greatest Muslim after Muhammad, studied both Al Farabi and Avicenna and was the first to employ Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian reasoning in defending Islamic faith. He argued that no obligation could flow from reason, and so emphasized the absolutely binding character of the shar'ia based on an intuitive mystical experience in the style of the Neo-Platonists.

On the whole Islamic perspective finds the interpretation of faith as an expression and manifestation of the divine will calling for the obedience of man.

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6. W.M. Watt. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Univ Press, 1979) pp. 58-71

James Narithukil

Dharmaram College,  
Bangalore- 29

# The Egyptian Osiris-Isis Myth and the Dravidian Cilappadikaram

There is general consensus among Dravidologists that the Dravidian peoples of India originally came from the Mediterranean region especially from Nubia, Upper Egypt. There are some archeological, linguistic, and religious evidences that support the theory of the Egyptian origins of the Dravidians. In further support of this view, I bring additional evidence from mythology: the popular Dravidian myth of Kovalan and Kannaki retold in Ilango Adigal's Tamil *Cilappadikaram* is closely related to and probably derived from one of the many versions of the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Isis. A comparative study of these myths shows that these two myths can illuminate and explain certain obscure aspects of each other.

## The Osiris-Isis Myth

Osiris, the Greek rendering of the Egyptian *Usire* and often identified with Dionysus and Hades, was perhaps a nature god of vegetation (according to James Frazier) who dies with the harvest and is reborn when the grain sprouts in spring. According to Wallis A. Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* (London, 1911), I, 56, Osiris, the dark god of the Nile, was worshipped throughout Egypt as the god of the dead and, in this capacity, became the most important Egyptian god and the supreme deity together with his consort Isis (*As* or *Ast* in Egyptian) and son Horus. From hieroglyphic and iconographic records it is clear that Osiris was worshipped before 3800 B.C., that his cult was well established by 2400 B.C., and that it continued through the fourth century A.D., the period of the enforced suppression of paganism in Rome. Because Osiris was so important to the Egyptians and they were so

familiar with his legends - their secular and religious literatures are replete with references to him - they never felt it necessary to leave a formal account of his legend in writing. However, we have some reliable, though incomplete, written accounts of the Osiris-cult in the works of the Greek Diodorus Siculus of the first century B.C. and of the Roman Plutarch of the following century; these historians have preserved some of the many Egyptian traditions about Osiris and Isis. It is my firm belief that the Dravidian *Cilappadikaram* has preserved some other elements of the same myth.

In the Pyramid Texts of the Book of the Dead of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties (2400 B. C.) there are references to the murder of Osiris by his brother Seth or Typhon in Nedjet near Abydos in Upper Egypt and the finding of the body of Osiris by his wife Isis and sister Nephthys (wife of Seth); some texts also allude to Osiris' drowning in the Nile, casting of his dismembered body in the Nile, and its discovery in the Nile Delta by Isis. The Egyptian texts also mention the embalming, preservation, and resuscitation of Osiris' body by Isis and the gods. Although Osiris was raised to life and embraced Isis who immediately conceived Horus, he did not continue his reign as king over Egypt: instead, he retired to the realm of the dead as judge; his murderer Seth was tried by the gods and was found guilty. Meanwhile Horus, the falcon god, was born to Isis. According to one version, Horus who succeeded Osiris as Pharaoh once fought Seth in a river in the form of hippopotami and sought to kill Seth, the murderer of his father; during the fight Isis felt pity for her brother Seth and asked Horus to spare the life of Seth even though he killed her husband and brother; there-upon in uncontrollable rage Horus cut off his mother's head: but God Thoth restored her life by placing a cowhead on her shoulders. In iconography Horus is often depicted as a child in the lap of his mother Isis; he is, however, most frequently presented as the falcon god.



According to Diodorus, Osiris was an ancient Egyptian king or Pharaoh who taught his people agriculture and the arts of civilised living; his wife and sister Isis introduced the use of wheat and barley. His brother Typhon, Seth murdered him and divided his body in twenty-six parts and scattered them all over Egypt. Typhon's reason for murdering Osiris was that Osiris had an affair with Typhon's wife Nephthys who had fallen in love with Osiris and borne him a child; the child was abandoned in the marshes of the Nile by Nephthys for fear of Typhon, but it was rescued by Isis with the help of dogs and was called Anubis, the guardian of gods. Isis recovered Osiris' body fragments except for the phallus and buried them secretly. Horus, Isis' son, avenged his father's death by slaying Typhon. After reigning as queen for many years, Isis died and was later deified in Upper Egypt and Memphis. Diodorus, however, does not discuss the role of Osiris in Egyptian religion.

According to Plutarch, Osiris was a king who travelled throughout Egypt and the rest of the world in order to teach mankind the arts of civilisation. When Osiris returned to Egypt after his many travels, he was murdered by brother Seth in the following manner. Seth, in collusion with seventy-two other conspirators, measured the body of Osiris and made a beautiful, richly decorated chest exactly to Osiris' dimensions. He offered the chest at a banquet to any guest whom it fitted. When Osiris laid himself in the chest, Seth slammed the lid, secured it fast, and threw it into the river Nile which carried it to the sea and eventually deposited it in Byblos on the Phoenician coast. The box came to rest on the shore, and a lovely tree grew up beside it and enclosed it. The king of Byblos, fascinated by this huge, beautiful tree, cut it down and made it into a pillar in his palace. The sorrowing Isis discovered the tree-made-into-a-pillar during her wanderings and brought it back to Egypt. She could not hide the pillar from Seth. The suspicious Seth cut the trunk open and discovered the body of Osiris inside it. He cut the body into fourteen parts and scattered the parts

throughout the country. Isis recovered the parts and buried them wherever they were found — this story explains why there are many burial places of Osiris in Egypt. Isis could not locate Osiris' genitals because it was swallowed by a fish (the Nile Crab *Oxyrhynchid*) that later became a taboo food for the Egyptians. Osiris later emerged from the underworld to train and equip his son Horus to avenge his death on Seth.

### Cilappadikaram

There are several versions of the myth of Kovalan and Kannaki among the Tamil Dravidians of South India. The best known form of the myth is its literary version *Cilappadikaram* (The Ankle Bracelet), ascribed to the Chera prince Ilango Adigal; the work was probably composed in the second century A. D. The Tamil tradition, however, attributes it to the Third Sangam Era (c. 1000 B.C.). In different versions of the myth we find the following interesting details which have a strong bearing on the Osiris-Isis myth.

Kovalan and Kannaki, two little orphans, came floating over River Kaveri to Pumpuhar, the capital of the Chola kingdom in two water-tight chests. The children were rescued by two wealthy merchants who brought them up as brother and sister. The couple were later united in marriage by their guardians. On the night of the wedding, Kovalan, a lover of dance and music, was attracted by the siren songs of the divine dancing girl Mathavi (daughter of Indra and Urvashi). Then and there Kovalan left his wife Kannaki and moved in with Mathavi who in due course bore him a daughter, Manimekhalai. Before the daughter was born, Kovalan was thrown out of the house by Mathavi who stripped him of all his wealth and cast him in the Kaveri. Kovalan returned to wife Kannaki who made clothes for him and welcomed him back as her husband. Since the couple were penniless except for Kannaki's jewels, they could not make a decent living in the city of Puhar. Therefore, they decided to leave the

Chola (Kovalan is perhaps the eponymous ancestor of the Cholas) city of Puhar for Madurai, the capital city of the Pandya kingdom. In Madurai Kovalan tried to sell one of the pearl anklets of his wife to a goldsmith to raise cash for his business. The roguish goldsmith who had in his possession one of the precious anklets of the Pandya queen for repairs falsely accused Kovalan of stealing the queen's anklet from his possession, with the hope of pocketing the crown jewel for himself. The king's men arrested Kovalan with the precious anklet of Kannaki on his person and brought him for trial to the king who was married to Kannaki's sister who had anklets similar to Kannaki's. The king in error identified Kannaki's anklet as the queen's in spite of Kovalan's protests and hastily judged Kovalan guilty of theft and sentenced him to death; an executioner carried out the death-sentence by cutting off Kovalan's head. When Kannaki heard of Kovalan's death, she hastened to the king's palace demanding justice and vindication. As soon as the unsuspecting Pandya queen identified Kannaki's anklet as different from hers, she fell into a swoon and died instantly. The angry Kannaki in anguish tore off one of her breasts and cast the bloody organ at the city of Madurai which was at once consumed by fire. Kannaki then went back to the place of execution and found the dead body of Kovalan and brought him back to life. A little later both husband and wife together ascended to heaven. After the story became widely known in South India, one day the single-breasted Kannaki appeared in the Chera kingdom in her radiant divine form. King Cenguttuvan ordered that a temple be built to this goddess. Mathavi, the courtesan mistress of Kovalan, renounced the world and became a Buddhist nun along with her daughter Manimekhalai (Precious Girdle).

In spite of the differences between the Egyptian myth of Osiris and the Dravidian myth of Kovalan, there are many similarities between them and the cultures that created them. The following points deserve our special consideration.

1. Resurrection is the main theme in both myths; the revival of the heroes is preceded by treachery perpetrated by kinsmen.

2. The goddesses collect the dismembered bodies of their husbands and bring them back to life.

3. In both myths there is an adulterous union which results in an offspring: Nephthys gives birth to Anubis, a son; Mathavi gives birth to Manimekhalai, a daughter, whose name means "Precious Girdle". Isis is often represented in iconography with a girdle. Girdle is common to both myths.

4. Osiris and Isis have a son, Horus. In the *Cilappatikaram* version, Kovalan and Kannaki do not have any sons. However, in the later traditions Kovalan is identified with Lord Siva and Kannaki with Goddess Parvati; they have as son Murugan, who in his turn is identified with Subramanian or Kartikeyan.

5. Birds are associated with the Egyptian Horus and the Dravidian Murugan in iconography: the falcon with Horus and the peacock with Murugan. Probably the Indian god Garuda is closer or even identical to the Egyptian *Harakhte* (falcon) to whom Horus is related. Is Murugan also related to *Harakhte*/Garuda?

6. The river has an important place in both myths; Kovalan and Kannaki come floating in River Kaveri in chests; Osiris' body is cast in the Nile in a chest, and Anubis is born in the marshes of the Nile Delta.

7. There is a great deal of travelling, wandering, and sojourning in both myths. The movements of the gods are symbolic of the wanderings of the Dravidian race both in Egypt and India. Isis symbolizes an exiled nation in Egypt, and Kannaki represents the exiled Dravidian race that came from Upper Egypt and finally settled down in South India after a long period of wanderings across the Arabian Sea and across the vast expanses of the Indian



Peninsula. In this respect, Isis and Kannaki as well as Kovalan (ancestor of the Cholas?) can be compared to Israel alias Jacob, the eponymous ancestor of Israel who went to Egypt and later returned to Canaan.

8. In both myths, gods are associated with civilisation: Osiris teaches Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike the arts of agriculture and other arts of civilisation; Kovalan and Mathavi are both musicians, and Kannaki, according to one version, is a weaver and a garment-maker for the naked Kovalan, as Yahweh makes garments for the naked Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis.

9. Phallus-cult is a major element in the Egyptian religion and the Indian religion. According to the testimony of Plutarch, Isis consecrated a long stone made in imitation of the missing phallus of Osiris and instituted a solemn festival to its memory, which used to be observed even during Plutarch's time by the Egyptians. The missing phallus of Osiris is probably behind the pre-Aryan phallic worship of the Indians. Phallus-worshippers are condemned in the *Rg-Veda*, which means that the phallic cult predates the arrival of the Aryans and probably belongs to the Dravidian culture. According to *Cilappadikaram* in Kaveripattanam there was a long stone set up in an open square which was resorted to and worshipped by those suffering from the effects of poison and witchcraft. The Dravidians probably brought phallic worship from Egypt and later connected it with Siva by identifying Kovalan and Siva with Osiris.

10. According to *Cilappadikaram*, Kannaki twisted and tore off one of her breasts in great anger and moral indignation. In some iconographic representations, Isis appears to tear off one of her breasts in anguish. Her anger, according to Plutarch, dried up River Phaedrus; her loud lamentations killed King Melcarthus' son; her angry looks at a child who stole behind her to look at the corpse of Osiris killed the little boy. The Indian version of the story seems to illumine an obscure aspect of

the Egyptian myth. Probably the Egyptian custom of representing Isis and other goddesses with one breast may have something to do with the Kannaki-version of the Isis-legend.

11. In the Egyptian Book of the Dead there is the mysterious "buckle" of Isis. The great Egyptologist E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* (London, 1911), I, 199, writes:

"The Egyptians associated the so-called "buckle" of Isis with the blood and magical words of power of that goddess, and they believed the object would protect the wearer against evil, but there is no evidence that they knew in later times what object it symbolized. The suggestion that the picture represents a buckle or belt has nothing to recommend it, and it is far more likely that it is a conventional representation of some member of the body of the goddess than anything else."

In view of the association of the Kannaki-legend with the Isis-myth, I suggest the "buckle"-symbol of Isis is really a representation of Isis' breast.

12. Another remarkable conclusion that emerges from this comparative study is the identity of the Egyptian amulet of the *ankh* in the hands of Isis and the other gods. It is not a sistrum or a bent cross. If Seth assassinated Osiris on the suspicion that he had stolen a royal anklet just as the Pandya king had Kovalan executed for suspected theft, then the Dravidian myth of Kovalan would supply the missing explanation for the anklet/sandal strap in the Osiris-myth. The sandal could also represent a royal insignia as in the *Ramayana* where Prince Bharata worships his brother Rama's sandal on a pedestal. I postulate this theory on the assumption that the *ankh* is an anklet/sandal strap. According to James Hamilton Paterson and Carol Andrews, *Death and Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1978), p. 83, "the *ankh* amulet represents the straps of the Egyptian sandal. It conferred on the wearer powers associated with life and living". The anklet or

bracelet in the hand of Isis reminds us of the *cilmbu-kazhi-nonbu* custom of the Tamil Sangam times when the bride would remove the anklet she had been wearing and wear the one given by the bridegroom.

13. It is interesting to note that Osiris' Egyptian name *Osire* is akin to the Tamil word, *usire* meaning "life". Of course, Osiris is associated with life and immortality.

14. Bull-worship is common to both the Dravidians and the Egyptians. During the Pongal-festival, bulls are worshipped in Tamil Nadu. In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the bull is the incarnation of Osiris and is to be worshipped. Egyptian kings, the descendants of Osiris, called themselves bulls (Wallis Budge, II, 397). There is sufficient evidence to the fact that bulls were sacred also in the Harappan culture which was probably Egyptian and Dravidian in its origin and development.

15. In Egypt, Isis is sometimes represented with the head of a cow; Horus was the one who had placed the cowhead on Isis' shoulders. I suspect that the horned god of one of the Harappan seals is a female god, a version of Isis, and not necessarily Pashupati Siva, if the Dravidian-Egyptian association is correct.

16. The Dravidians also share serpent-cult in common with the ancient Egyptians.

17. The headdresses of gods and kings in Egyptian iconography and Dravidian statues are very similar.

18. Osiris is the dark god of Egypt; Dravidian India also has a dark god, Kannan, who is known as Krishna in the Aryan religion; Krishna grew up in Mathura (North India), which was probably originally a Dravidian city like the southern Madurai.

19. In both Egyptian and Dravidian religions, the Sun is a great god. Phonetically, the Egyptian word for the sun, *Ra*, is quite akin to the Tamil *el/veil* - the sounds *l* and *r* are often interchangeable in many languages; further, metathesis is a common phenomenon in most languages.

20. The lotus as cosmic flower is a common religious motif both in India and ancient Egypt. According to the Papyrus of Ani, the soul rises from the primeval lotus, which can be seen in many Egyptian paintings. The lotus of *anantasayanam*, along with the primeval serpent, is a contribution of the Dravidians of ancient Egypt and India to the Aryan Hindus.

21. If Kashi the holy place (alias Varanasi) is a Dravidian word, the name was bestowed on the place by the Dravidians after their homeland of Nubia, Upper Egypt, which is called *Kush* and *Kashi* in the Semitic languages.

22. Both the Dravidians and the Egyptians believe in the antiquity of their legends. Among the Tamils there is a belief in Three Sangam Ages which go back to 10,000 B. C. The legend was first recorded by Nakkirar in his commentary on the *Iraiyanar Akapporul*: the First Sangam flourished for 4040 years in Southern Madurai with 549 members, the Second Sangam for 3700 years in Kapata-puram with 59 members, and the Third for 1800 years in Northern Madurai after the Great Deluge. The Kovalan-Kannaki story allegedly took place during the Third Sangam Age. As noted before, the Osiris-cult flourished in Nubia during the Neolithic and the Predynastic Periods, that is, around 4500 B. C.

The above-mentioned similarities between the Egyptian myth and the Dravidian myth and between the ancient Egyptian culture and the Dravidian culture can be viewed either as purely coincidental or as genetically related. If the mythological similarities were the only common thing between ancient Nubia of Upper Egypt and Dravidian South India, I would dismiss by all means any claim for genetic kinship between the two cultures. On the contrary, I view the common myth only as another piece of evidence supporting the widely held theory that the Dravidians of India came from the Mediterranean region, particularly from Nubia, for, ethnically and linguistically, the peoples of the two regions are strikingly similar.



Ethnically speaking, there is a misconception among many people that all the blacks of Africa are Negroes with frizzy hair, thick lips, and prognathous chins. On the contrary, there is a wide variety of races and ethnic communities in Africa. The Semitic, Hamitic, and Caucoid peoples of Northern Africa are not Negroes. The people of Nubia, by and large, are not Negroes; rather, they are like the Dravidians of South India: they have black skin, straighty or wavy hair, and orthognathous chins. Further, there is some mythological evidence to the Mediterranean Greek connection of the Egyptians/Nubians. According to Aeschylus' play, *Suppliants*, during pre-historic times fifty refugee women from Egypt (the Danaids, daughters of the Pelasgian Danaos) fled marriage to their lustful Egyptian cousins, the fifty sons of their father's brother, Egyptos. These maidens arrived in Argos, the kingdom of Pelasgos, and were granted asylum because, according to Greek religious beliefs, suppliants were under the jealous protection of Zeus and the other gods. This myth suggests that the Dravidian language as one of the ancient Egyptian languages has some affinities with the Pelasgian language of ancient Greece — this affinity was pointed out many years ago by the late S. K. Chatterji.

Linguistically speaking, linguists like Mlle Homburger, Cheik Diaye, Robert Caldwell, and S. K. Chatterji have pointed out significant similarities between Old Tamil and the ancient languages of the Mediterranean area and the modern languages of the Sudano-Sahelian civilisations of Egypt and Nubia. A comparative study of the Tamil language and the African languages is beyond the scope of this paper, but readers' attention is directed to the works of the linguists mentioned above. In this context, I would like to add to their vocabulary lists some common Egyptian words that are phonologically and semantically similar to their Tamil cognates: *pharaoh—periya* (Tamil) "the great thing"; *shrr—ceru* (Tamil) "small"; *per—pura* (Tamil) "house"; *nilus—niru* (Tamil) "water" —Sanskrit *narah* is not an Indo-European word; it is probably derived

from Dravidian *niru*. Robert Caldwell had pointed out years ago several cognate words in the Semitic languages and Tamil and suggested "an ancient prae-historic intermixture or association of the Dravidians with the Semitic race" (*A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages*, Madras, 1961, rpt. p. 606). This Semitic-Dravidian connection can be easily understood if we bear in mind that in Egypt and Nubia the Semitic influence had been very pervasive during pre-historic and later times; the biblical story of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt is the best known illustration for the Semitic-Egyptian contacts; today Arabic, a Semitic language is spoken in Egypt and Sudan; Amharic, another Semitic language, is spoken in Ethiopia which until the twelfth century used Geez, a once-popular Semitic language, as *lingua franca*.

Apropos of this discussion is the theory that the Harappan hieroglyphics are derived from some form of ancient Egyptian picture writing which had gone through several changes before it reached India. Perhaps some of the seals of Harappa and Mohenjādaro can be decyphered as telling the story of Osiris and Isis or Kovalan and Kannaki. In this context Burnell's observation about the origin of the Tamil script is relevant:

The only possible theory of the origin of the character of the southern inscriptions is that it is importation brought by traders from the Red Sea, and thence from Phoenicia, and is therefore of Egyptian origin, eventually. In many respects the Old Tamil alphabet resembles that of the Himyaritic inscriptions found in Yemen (cited by Caldwell, p. 127).

It should be borne in mind that many Nubians, according to their oral traditions, originally came from the Arabian Peninsula, which would explain not only the Semitic origin of their script but also the presence of many semitic words in their vocabulary.

When and how did the Nubians migrate to India? I believe that the migration took place in the third millennium B. C. According to the Stele of Palermo, the Egyptian Seneferu, the last king of the Third Dynasty, made a great raid on Nubia around 2613 B. C., and caused terrible destruction and a major dislocation of the Nubians; the Pharaoh brought thousands of slaves and cattle to Egypt from Nubia. Many Nubians at this time probably migrated from Africa to Asia. Some of the emigrants travelled overland across Mesopotamia, Iran, and Afghanistan to India, the land's end. The Dravidian Brahuīs of Baluchistan, whose oral traditions claim that their ancestors came from the Phoenician coast, are probably a remnant of these land-travelling refugees who arrived in North India and established there an urban civilisation before the arrival of the Aryans. A large number of the exiles, on the other hand, travelled to India across the Arabian Sea. That the Egyptians had sea-worthy sail boats is obvious from ancient pyramidal reliefs and from the fact that on May 26, 1954 the royal ship of Cheops buried about 2600 B. C., was discovered at the base of the Great Pyramid by Kamal el-Mallakh; the ship was 150 feet long and its cedar wood came from Lebanon. The ancient Tamils, on their part, had canoes, boats, and ships; we know this from the evidence of the words used in early Sangam-works. Puhar, according to *Cilappadikaram*, was a busy port. Quite recently Thor Heyerdahl discovered 4000-year old ruins of pyramidal temples, twenty phallic statues, and hieroglyphic inscriptions similar to those of the Indus Valley Civilisation in Maldiv Islands, a gateway to South India. These were probably left behind by the Nubian Dravidians on their way to South India.

To conclude: The Osiris-Isis myth of the ancient Egyptians is closely related to the Kovalan-Kannaki myth of the Dravidians of South India. This new evidence from mythology supports the theory that the Dravidians of India came originally from Nubia, Upper Egypt.

# Book Reviews

## POST-SIXTH CENTURY CHALDEAN TRADITION

(A Review Article on: **THE CHRISTOLOGY OF MAR BABAI THE GREAT**, by Geevarghese Chediath, Kottayam, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1982)

Right from the earlier part of this century there appeared in the West an ever increasing interest to study the long neglected traditions of the Eastern Churches. There had been a centuries-old-presumption, born out of ignorance that since the great majority of Eastern Christians were not in communion with Rome they represented the past heresies and that nothing was to be gained by a study of the traditions of the separated Churches. The depth of this prejudice and ignorance can be seen in this that even as late as Vatican II the very first sentence of the Council's decree: *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* on the Eastern Churches places on one side the "Catholic Church" (evidently the Latin Church) and on the other "the Eastern Churches" as non-Catholic! A thaw in this cold attitude to the East began with the mass exodus to the West of Oriental Church scholars under the impact of the Russian Communist revolution. The numerous spiritual writings of these scholars who settled down in the West revealed the depth of Eastern theology, liturgy and spirituality. This created a general interest to reverse the policy of Latinization consistently adopted in the past towards those Eastern Churches that entered into communion with Rome and to study the Eastern traditions positively and sympathetically.

From the very establishment of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy, Rome, at the urging of the Roman Orientalists, was asking the Syro-Malabar church to accept the whole Chaldean tradition as its genuine heritage. But the bishops,



who against the background of their training in Latin seminaries had an abiding fear of Nestorianism, consistently resisted the move. As an effective step to overcome this resistance the Roman academic authorities encouraged the Indian ecclesiastical students doing their higher studies in Rome to take up one or another aspect of the Syro-Malabar and Chaldean traditions as the topic of their doctoral dissertation. But this involved a serious risk. Rome does not have enough scholars well familiar with the Eastern traditions concerned. The students were left very much on their own. As the earlier opposition to Eastern traditions was irrational and uncritical, here there was the opposite danger of uncritically approving and white-washing real errors owing to an oversympathetic study of a tradition quite unfamiliar to the Roman scholars.

In this series of studies comes the doctoral dissertation of Geevarghese Chediath on the Christology of Babai the Great (551-628). Sebastian P. Brock of Oxford writing in a recent issue of *Sobornost* about the Oriental studies emanating from India calls the book a landmark study since Chediath who belongs to the Malankara Rite and the Antiochian tradition is sympathetically studying an author of the Chaldean tradition. Babai was called great (or rather "big" because in the same town where he lived there was another monk called Babai smaller in stature. But subsequently Babai proved himself great by the radical change he effected in the Chaldean tradition and the lasting influence he had on posterity. The ideas, thought patterns and faith positions he introduced remained unchanged at least for a millennium after him.

Chediath has worked hard to understand the thought of Babai going through his numerous works, comparing his concepts and terms with those of his contemporaries. But Babai is an astute polemist deliberately vague, constantly demolishing the positions of his adversaries but rarely revealing his own mind. So Babai's writings constitute a veritable trap for those who proceed by the ordinary scholarly method of comparing texts, stating what is

in them and not caring to go and examine the suppositions and implications of those texts. Greater part of Chediath's book is spent in discussing almost in every chapter the positions of Cyril, Nestorius, Theodore, Eutychus, Philoxenus, Severus and others, though the author admits that Babai was very much his own man and very little influenced by the opinions of these others. Though Babai was faithful to Nestorius and Nestorian positions he develops his own line of thinking independently of others (p. 188). The weakness of the whole study is that very little space is devoted to an examination of the logical progression of Babai's thinking, which can be clear to any one who examines the arguments and analogies used by him. Babai's treatise on Union is a systematic work with a neat order of topics that reveals the mind of the author. Unfortunately no hermeneutical analysis of the book is attempted in the thesis. The method used is taking isolated texts to prove some one's pre-understanding of the author! Perhaps from the beginning the author was committed to his resolve "to understand the Christology of Mar Babai the Great of the Nestorian Church in an ecumenical perspective" (p. v). Hence the main conclusions Chediath arrives at are not admissible from the point of view of Catholic Faith. Babai is too systematic a writer to be reinterpreted in a way acceptable to those he violently opposed throughout his life!

First of all Chediath states: "Babai's Christology is built in great part on a sound exegesis" (p. 194). Babai does not at all establish a sound exegetical method true to the tradition of Ss. Ephrem, Afraates and others. What he actually does is to take every text of Scripture out of its context, twist and use it to suit his thesis. Thus he uses Phil. 2:7 to argue that if the Forma of God is one hypostasis or qnoma, the form of the servant should be another distinct qnoma, merely united to the divinity. He interprets Jn 2:19 in the sense that Christ's humanity was merely a temple in which the divine Logos dwelt. He interprets Heb 13:8 by splitting it and applying "yesterday and today" to Christ's humanity and "for ever" to the

divinity. Innumerable texts of the Bible are simply "used" by Babai and no effort is made to understand the total message of salvation that is contained in them!

Then Father Chediath makes the astounding statement: Babai "presents a Christology which is as orthodox as the Christology of the Alexandrian tradition. His stress is on the Parsopa of Filiation of the Word..... The "homo assumptus" was in the tradition of the Church. When there are two independent qnome, then it becomes heretical. But as long as the two exist in the one Parsopa, the one having dependence on the other, it is orthodox" (p. 194).

Here the crucial question we have to ask is, what is the test of orthodoxy? Certain expressions which were legitimate from a common sense point of view at a certain time, became unacceptable from the perspective of stricter analysis. "Homo assumptus" could be legitimate if it were properly understood, but not in the sense Babai understood it. The crucial question both in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies was salvation. The golden principle accepted by the Fathers of Nicea in settling the Arian controversy was that if the Logos was not truly the Son of God but only a creature, he could not have saved us. Against the Eunomians the Fathers pointed out that if the Holy Spirit is not truly God he cannot divinize us. The primary purpose of the divine Incarnation is human salvation. Salvation is not mere remission of sins but effectively attaining a share in divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This was accomplished only when a child of our race who could truly say "I am the Son of God" effectively incorporated in himself the many as his brothers and sisters. Though in the early missionary discourses salvation is shown as the work of the Father sending his Beloved, Jesus Christ, in fulfilment of the promise made to Israel, soon the centrality of Jesus in the work of redemption is emphasized. "There is no salvation in any one else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12). St. Paul's

whole argument against the Greeks is that only one who is truly God and truly man at the same time could be true mediator between God and men; Jesus is that one Mediator. Pope Leo in his famous *Tomus* does not use any philosophy but only states the simple perception of faith: Our Lord and Saviour has to be One, at home at the same time both in humanity and in the divinity. The Council of Ephesus makes the same faith statement: If Mary is not the Mother of God the son of Mary whom we claim as our Saviour is not really God and so cannot be our Saviour. The terminology used by the Councils, *homousios*, *hypostasis*, *persona* and the rest was clumsy. For almost two hundred years after these councils people stated their unhappiness with it. What the Fathers wanted to do through those inadequate formulations was to exclude clearly erroneous teachings and affirm positively that in the one God there are really distinct Three, and in Christ there is only One Saviour at home both in humanity and in divinity. Only much later was an adequate definition of "person" even attempted.

But for Babai and the whole Chaldean tradition after him the primary purpose of the Incarnation is the revelation of the divine mystery. The whole structure and arrangement of topics in Babai's treatise on Union shows this primary concern. Object of faith is the divine reality and what distinguishes the Christians from other religions according to Babai is the true knowledge of God in the Trinity of the *qnome* (c.1). The manifestation in the flesh of the Word in the Incarnation is to reveal to us the true divine nature and its three *qnome*. The very statement of the angel in the Annunciation: "The Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father will overshadow you and the one who is to be born from thee is holy and will be called the Son of the Most High" was made to indicate the *qnome* of the Word, the Eternal Son of the Most High; for he inhabits unitively in him who was formed by the Holy Spirit and whom he made one Son in an indissoluble adhesion (c.5). The Word united himself to Jesus "by a voluntary and personal adhesion and inhabitation so that God the Word



may be revealed in him and in order to fulfil in him the whole economy and to show forth the beginning of the new world and that he may be eternally adored in him" (c.10). "From all eternity God was contemplating his Trinitarian nature and considering when and how to reveal it to us. So God decreed that the word consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit should by his eternal will reveal himself in flesh by putting on the person of the economy of our human nature and make it with him one Son in the one dignity for ever and fulfil in it the whole economy of our life and our salvation." (c. 6)

Jesus of Nazareth was chosen for this role not by any arbitrary preference or partiality but only owing to an eternal prevision of his merits. Babai and others constantly assert that the Word and Jesus make one Son and one parsopa. But the divine sonship properly and naturally belongs only to the Word and to Christ's humanity not through adoption but "through adhesion and union". Similarly the one parsopa in Christ does not stand for the one divine personality of the Word, but for the union between the Word and Jesus. Babai explains it with the analogy of the unity between sun and its reflection in a mirror made out of iron. There is no mixture between them; the properties of the sun and iron are different. "But the mirror receives all that is of the sun, not in its nature, but through union with the sun, shining in one light in the one parsopa of the sun and of the mirror" (c.11). A man and his shadow are not two persons; a thing and its reflection are not two but make one parsopa! If the primary scope of the Incarnation is the revelation of the Word to receive our adoration this perspective is understandable. But if the scope of the Incarnation is to provide humanity with a divine head in whom all creation is recapitulated and led back to the Father, Babai's position is clearly heretical and inadmissible.

According to Chediath "Babai's Christology can be considered the best interpretation of the Antiochene position" (p. 195) because he avoids the double sonship

in Christ and maintains the Antiochene insistence on the perfectness of the human nature of Christ and its servant form. But in fact Babai does not avoid Nestorianism, which was essentially the denial of the absolute oneness of the divine sonship in Christ. Babai pretends to avoid duality only by reducing the sonship of the humanity to a mere reflection or shadow of the divine Son. Perfect humanity of Christ and its being the form of the servant was the common doctrine of most Christian churches.

Where Babai and the post-sixth century Chaldeans dramatically depart from the earlier Antiochene and Edessan traditions is in the very approach to faith. Both Theodore of Mopsuestia and St. Ephrem start their theologizing from the concrete experience of the Risen Lord in the midst of the worshipping community. Babai and others tried to philosophize the whole of theology. Unfortunately they had at their disposal only the defective metaphysical categories of Aristotle, whose works had been translated into Syriac. Babai's positions are so uncompromisingly definite that there is no possibility of putting a benign interpretation on them.

The strange phenomenon of the post sixth century Chaldean Church is that it has no proper ecclesiology. The mention of the Church as bride of Christ etc. found in the Divine Office are leftovers from an earlier period. Only Abdiso (+1318) in his *Marganitha* has a small chapter on the church. Isoyab III (647-658) and Timothy I (780-823) occasionally mention the church only to affirm their authority in it. Ever since the synod of Markabta in 424 the Persian Church declared itself independent from all external authority. Mt. 16:18 is interpreted by Babai, Timothy I and Iso'dad of Merv as designating not the person of Peter but his faith. Since by the condemnation of Nestorius the rest of the Church in its entirety fell into apostasy the Nestorian church is said to be identical with the universal Church. Besides, if the ministry of the Church is to preach the true divine mystery, how can a particular tradition of the experience of the infinite

Godhead be judged by any other tradition? Babai's philosophical preoccupation drew him closer to the rational mysticism of Evagrius, for whom the highest spiritual perfection was the self-achievement of man to contemplate the Trinity. There was no need for an immediate self-communication by the Spirit of God for this intimate union as Ps. Dionysius and Ephrem held. In the Gnostic tradition human spirit was capable of achieving it by itself.

Chediath's hope that Babai's Christology has a very significant place in the Universal Church in this post-Vatican era of theological pluralism is rather misplaced. Theological pluralism supposes unity of faith. When fundamental data of faith are denied there is no scope for theology.

John B. Chethimattam

Dept. of Philosophy  
Fordham University

*Indian Christian Sannyasa and Swami Abhishiktananda*,  
Emmanuel Vattakuzhy, Bangalore: TPI. 1981. pp. xix, 244

It is more than ten years since the French Benedictine Fr. Henri les Saux, who took the name of Swami Abhishiktananda (Bliss of Christ) passed away. Coming to India in 1947 Swamiji joined Abbè Monchanin (who took the name Swami Parama Arupananda, the Bliss of the Supreme Spirit) and endeavoured to fashion Christian religious life in the style of Indian sannyasa. Religious life was not anything original in Christianity, but something that came to it in the course of time by the influence of Hinduism and Buddhism. This is made obvious by the fact that consecrated religious life started in Christianity not in the centres of Christendom like Jerusalem, Antioch or Rome but on its frontiers of encounter with Eastern religious in Mesopotamia and Egypt. So in coming to India to learn the spirit of Indian Sannyasa Abhishiktananda was coming to the original source of the institution of religious

life. The book is a doctoral thesis that studies the ideas of Swami Abhishiktananda on Christian monastic life in the Indian context. In trying to shape Christian religious life and the Indian style the two French priests and others who followed their example were only reviving an attempt made in the early part of this century by a Hindu convert to Christianity, Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya. Around 1900 he wrote in the journal *Sophia*: "Monastic life is exceedingly congenial to the soil of India. In this age of materialism, when contemplative life is despised India is still dotted over with monasteries." But Brahmabandhab's efforts at integrating Indian monastic ideals to Christianity failed owing to the strong opposition from the Apostolic Delegate Msgr. Zaleski. Besides the ideals of Brahmabandhab the great example of the Hindu anchorite of Arunachala, Ramana Maharshi deeply influenced Abhishiktananda. After a visit to the caves of Arunachala, in 1953 Swamiji wrote: "It seems to me that I would explain my actual state after Arunachala as a dawn before sunset, when the sky is already illumined: *Jyotis* (light), *Santi* (peace), *Ananda* (bliss). With the singing of birds, my heart too joins in the morning. I wait with joy the apparition of the marvellous disc" (p. 76).

After an introductory chapter on Indian Sannyasa in general Fr. Vattakuzhy explains with a short life of Swamiji the evolution of his religious ideals. Abhishiktananda's ideal of religious life, shaped as it was by the examples of Brahmabandhab and Ramana Maharshi has strong intellectualist emphasis with an Advaitic bent. Even the mystery of the Trinity is interiorised under the Indian concepts of Saccidananda. For Swamiji sannayasa is a state of God experience; the essential charism of the *jnani* is an unquenchable desire for the Absolute (p. 111). It is the concretization of the Hindu mentality that nothing is ultimately worthwhile unless it leads to God-consciousness (p. 115).

Another important theme in the discussion of Indian Sannyasa is the close relation between renunciation and



contemplation. The core of Hindu Sannyasa is renunciation and what is renounced is not mere material wealth but one's Ego. According to Swamiji renouncing the renouncer is the most important part of renunciation (p.130). Christian religious vows of chastity, poverty and obedience form an integral part of this life of renunciation. It will be empty unless it is coupled with contemplation: "As far as God has not become a reality in our life, we have not set our foot on the ladder", wrote Swamiji from the caves of Arunachala. "The monk by his vocation has to manifest through himself the Presence, fully concentrated with his body and soul in the Presence." (pp.156-157)

Complementary to renunciation is the dimension of involvement in the world, which is integral to Sannyasa. Sannyasa is not an escape from the world, but rather an escape with the world. Abhishiktananda maintained a balanced attitude towards the world. Chapter five of the book gives the details of this involvement. The book on the whole is a good introduction to the life and work of Swami Abhishiktananda.

Abhishiktananda was not a systematic theologian but a mystic who clarified his ideas through symbolism and imagery and even by silence. Hence when an effort is made to bring his ideas within the rigid logical framework of a doctoral thesis those who have been familiar with Abhishiktananda during his life may feel a certain disappointment. But this cannot be avoided. The only remedy is to go back to Swamiji's writings.

J. B. Chethimattam

*The Missionary Consciousness of the St. Thomas Christians*, Fr. Paul Thenayan. Cochin Viani Publications, 1982. pp. xxv. 215. Rs. 30

The book gives an historical survey of the missionary activities of the St. Thomas Christians. Starting with

a summary discussion of the origin and early history up to the 16th century of the Malabar Church the author explains stage by stage its missionary efforts. Though the early East Syrian Church was very dynamic in its missionary efforts spreading the Gospel even in China, the Malabar church which was in close relationship with it, does not seem to have caught up this missionary spirit. This was mostly owing to the restrictions of caste system in which Christians too found a special place and later on account of the conflict with the European Latin Missionaries who monopolised the whole missionary field. The available literature in this area of the missionary activities of the St. Thomas Church is so scant that the first five chapters of the book read like a simple general history of the church. Most of the material here has already appeared in various other books.

The interesting section of the book is the concluding chapter which discusses the present missionary consciousness of the church. There is no doubt that under the leadership of indigenous bishops the Malabar Church has become a community of apostles set on fire with the zeal of faith. Thousands of her sons and daughters are working as priests, brothers and sisters all over India. That the Malabar Church has sent about two thousand girls to replenish the dwindling religious communities of the West shows the extent of this missionary enterprise (pp. 158-161).

But this does not mean that all is well with the missionary orientation of the St. Thomas Christians. First of all there is the urgent need that the Indian Church, cut up into rites, dioceses, parishes, religious orders and socio-cultural and linguistic groups should present a common front in the task of evangelization, united in the common faith and mission and rooted in Indian soil, thoroughly at home in its various languages, cultures, and ways of life (p. 163). It has also to adopt new missionary methods to face the modern situation.

Much more serious is the identity crisis found today in the Syro-Malabar Church. Though the Oriental Rites



are equal in dignity with the Latin Rite and have equal rights with it to preach the Gospel anywhere, this right has been systematically denied to the Malabar-Church outside its narrow confines. This has created a situation in which Malabarians can do mission work only by abandoning the traditional Rite and embracing the Latin Rite. This is certainly an unjust condition which has to be fought against with all legitimate means.

But as the author rightly points out, the above mentioned unjust situation has created an overreaction in the Malabar Church with far reaching baneful effects. The first result of this overreaction is an irrational flight from modernity into the imagined security of a dead but idolized past. In the name of fidelity to past traditions there is a constant refusal of a living adaptation to the actual needs of the people (pp. 166-167). In this respect according to the author the Consultation on Evangelization by the Oriental Churches in India held at Kottayam 1973 is quite remarkable with its resolutions introverted to an exaggerated self-consciousness of the oriental identity of the Church, completely ignoring the need to collaborate with other Churches and to inculturate its traditions in the particular socio-religious context of the mission areas (pp. 168-171). The author quotes Fr. Placid as saying that our missionary task is to communicate to the Hindus not only the Christian faith but also the "Syriac treasures" (p. 175). If this is true this would not be much different from the European cultural imperialism of Schleiermacher's mission Theology!

Cardinal Joseph Parecattil in his foreword to the book strongly points out the disastrous consequences of this shortsighted policy. He shows the meaninglessness of the oft-repeated formula used to describe the Syro-Malabar Church as "Christian in faith, Oriental in worship and Hindu in culture". First of all, ours is not a Hindu culture, but Indian culture. Besides it implies that at least in principle, not to speak of actual life, worship can be separated

from faith, and faith and worship from culture! But any Theologian knows that this is impossible. In spite of this criticism the formula is still being repeated with the compulsion of a "chain-prayer" and somebody wrote that phrase even into the speech read by President Zail Sing at the inauguration of the Vadavathoor faculty last November. It is high time that this meaningless formula be given a quite burial.

The Message of the book deserves serious consideration by all the members of the Apostolic Church of St. Thomas. We are not going to win our legitimate rights by sulking like spoilt children and isolating ourselves from the actual concerns of the Indian people. We can gain recognition on the national level and secure our all India rights, only if we positively demonstrate that we are willing to take up all-India responsibilities by committing men and money for all India projects and assume leadership in the national level as we are expected to. For the missionary isolation of the Malabar Church it has, first of all, to blame itself!

J. B. Chethimattam